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SQUADRON OF DEATH

Jonathan Roehrig -
Christmas, 1929 -
From Daddy -

Jonathan Roehrig
32 Fern Street
Auburndale, Mass.

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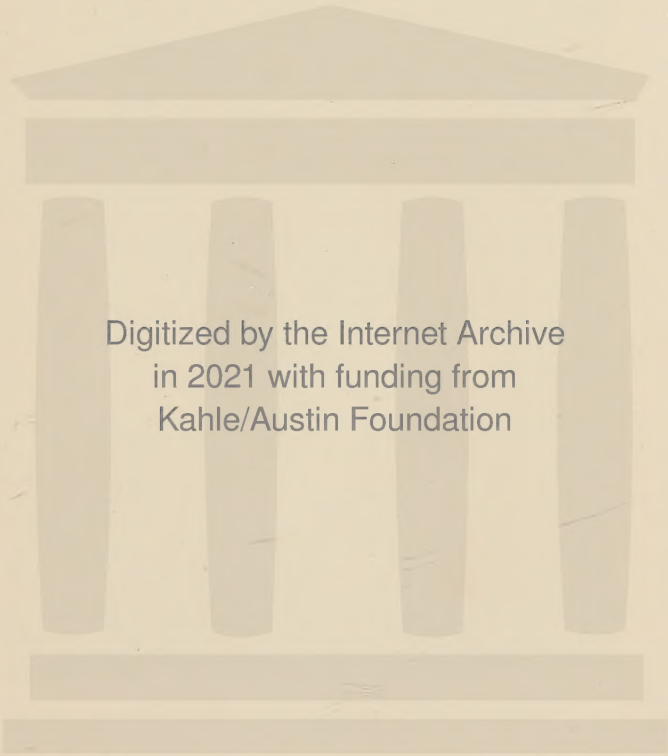
SQUADRON OF DEATH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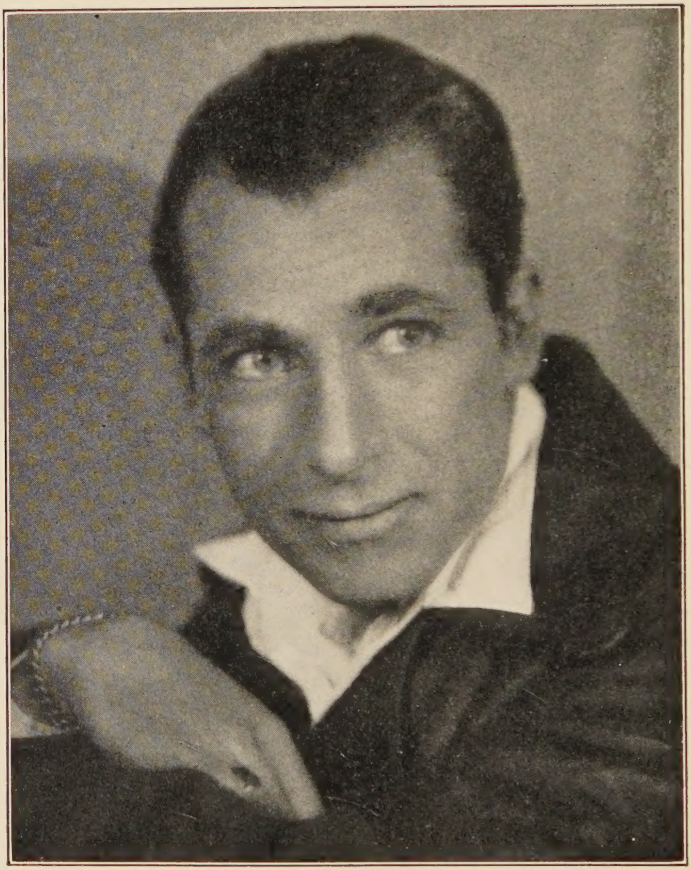

DICK GRACE, *captain of the Squadron of Death.*

SQUADRON OF DEATH

The True Adventures of
A Movie Plane-Crasher

BY

DICK GRACE
Captain of the Squadron of Death

ILLUSTRATIONS
FROM PHOTOGRAPHS

DOUBLEDAY, DORAN & COMPANY, INC.
GARDEN CITY, NEW YORK
1929

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FIRST EDITION

TO MY FATHER

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SQUADRON OF DEATH

I

IN THE NAME OF SCIENCE

When I was very young I wanted to fly.

I watched birds, how they glided and climbed, dived and banked without moving a wing tip. I'd never heard those terms then. Nobody had. But I saw these bird "stunts" as something human fliers would have to learn.

North Dakota, near the Canadian border, was where I met my first eagle. He was the bird I envied. He was a king. He wasn't conceited, but he knew there was nothing he couldn't do in the air. I wanted his secret.

I was good at trapping wild animals, though often I wouldn't kill them. Catching an eagle influenced my future in the air, I think. He was almost as big as I was, and as strong, with a wing spread of ten feet. He fought like a devil and almost downed me till toward the end. Then I had him, but something made me let him go. As he soared away I said to myself: "If I could do what he does!"

Next best were the nighthawks. They weren't so dignified as eagles, but what they could do nobody else could. It never bored me to go out and wait for them.

The nighthawks flew in pairs, male and female. They had their signals in the sky. I wondered what those signals were, and I'm wondering now. We couldn't do better in

the war than copy them. They'd start together, and separate till they'd flown far apart. But on that signal they'd dive earthward, then straighten out and pass one another like streaks of lightning. As they did this they'd open their beaks to give a peculiar call. This was evidently a signal to gather speed and zoom high into the sky side by side.

The nighthawks were the only birds who did these things. Each evening in the northern dusks they gave this small spy a lesson.

It was from gulls that I learned about airplane control. They were fine to watch, particularly to see how the fledglings improved as they grew older and lost their young gray feathers. They practised using their wing tips and their tails, making a stream line with their feet.

I wasn't born in Dakota, but in Minnesota; and of a legal family, with a few famous surgeons here and there. I was supposed to follow in the footsteps of my father, who was a lawyer and rose to Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of North Dakota.

Our town of to-day wasn't much of a town in my bird-studying days. Then it was a dot on a stretch of prairie, where we had cowboys for neighbors who, when they drove their herds to market, used to get gay and shoot off their guns to frighten the tenderfoot. Maybe my feet weren't tender! Anyhow, I wasn't afraid of the cowboys, so they let me go with them, and taught me to ride bucking horses bareback. That experience helped me later in the air. I don't know why exactly, though there was often plenty of air between me and a broncho's back.

All through this period I had a number of other boys to play around with in Dakota, to say nothing of girls, whom in those days I detested. But my gang didn't all care about the things I cared for, for if they took any interest in birds it was merely to steal their eggs, and half of the books I read bored them. One story I liked was in a volume of Greek mythology. It was about Icarus, who might be called the first stunt airman, and is the first aviator on record so far as I know.

A few hundred years B. C. he determined to fly. He made a pair of wings, like a bird's, and might have started an air force for his country if—well, it was a big "if"! But I said to myself—this was in 1912, when I was fourteen—"Seems to me the only trouble with that guy's invention was that he made his wings out of wax, so the sun melted them before he could prove his point."

I always studied my problems alone without asking help; and figuring out his, I thought Icarus must have lived where there were plenty of beehives, so wax was the stuff nearest to hand. I resolved, after lying awake nights in my bedroom at home, to try and make an ass out of Icarus.

The only height I had available was a barn, and the barn loft was my workshop. I hid myself and my materials there, not to rouse the curiosity of my parents; and in that barn loft I gave birth to the first glider in the history of our neighborhood. Unlike the wings that failed poor old Icarus, mine were of staunch wood and stout linen, which took all of my pocket money. When my masterpiece was complete I loved it so much I dreaded to risk it in the big adventure. I didn't think much about my own bones; it

was the fear of hurting my glider that worried me. However, the thing was born for an experiment.

Gliders of those days, seventeen years ago, were ungainly things to handle, even when constructed scientifically. I was no pessimist, and I used my gray matter figuring out how to manage the apparatus, even though I had little chance of making a perfect flight. I'd tie myself to the controls and trust to luck for the trial stunt. Then, if all was right, I'd give my public demonstration on top of the Main School building. But it must be the barn roof for the first flight.

The barn I picked was no common barn, but one deserted for years, and useful in my plans not only for its remoteness but for the slant of its roof.

I got my machine onto this roof under cover of night and watched beside it till dawn while my parents imagined me in bed. At sunrise I tied myself in by the flimsy straps, and when I had cautiously noted the wind's direction I prepared to leap.

I say "prepared," but I didn't really do much preparing, for even then I had air instinct enough to know that one must never hesitate. To go clear through even with an error at a crucial moment is better than indecision. An aviator's motto in a crisis must be: "Right or wrong, go ahead!"

Tied to my glider I crawled over the roof edge, and instantly fell twenty feet before the thing gathered any lift whatever. This disappointed me, but I didn't have much time to think while I fell. Suddenly, however, the machine seemed to get the wind under its breast feathers. I hoped

again. But joy was premature. Either I overcontrolled the thing or it was built wrong, for I found myself doing an almost complete loop, maybe the first ever made. It ended by landing me head first in a pile of old manure, and when I was able to dig myself clear I felt more like an angleworm than an eagle.

As for my poor masterpiece, I had to rescue the remnants of my first crack-up with a pitchfork and bury them on the spot where they lay.

I never liked failing when I'd worked hard, so now I had to do something or count myself a failure. My next idea was inviting my friends to see me ride a bicycle around the eaves of the schoolhouse, three stories high, where I'd wanted to give my glider exhibition. They all jeered and said I was nutty. They knew I had no bicycle and could hardly ride one. But my pride made me go on. I borrowed my brother's bike without asking him, practised a bit on the ground, and more by luck than skill gave my show.

This restored some of my self-respect after the glider fluke and led to a few other experiments, such as getting out of my second-story window in the middle of the night and sliding down the side of the house to see that free winter entertainment staged by Nature: the Northern Lights.

Of course I could have looked from my window. But I liked to be out of doors alone in Nature's reception room. The lights would spread like the sticks of a fan, fold themselves, and spread again. And the orchestra music was the lonesome wail of the coyote, the sharp yap of the wild fox, and the howl of the prairie wolf. It was one of the formal affairs of the season for me.

By day, as I said, I would track and trap wild things, and the powers of observation I learned in noting their ways helped me in aviation later, especially in war flying and stunt work where an eye for detail and the habit of making instant decisions are important.

As for the snakes that infested our prairie, though I detested reptiles as most people do, watching for them, waiting for them to spring, and learning how to kill the different species gave me patience and wariness.

An aviator must learn to love or at least tolerate so-called monotony and loneliness, and I did learn some sort of kinship with Nature watching wild animals on our prairie.

Nowadays it's I who must try to cheat Death, lurking like a trapper to catch me and my best friends. Being a boy in North Dakota trained me for the strenuous life.

My parents I thought of then, and still think of, as the two best people in the world. I had a snow experience with my father on a day of blizzard which got under my skin and has stayed there.

We had only one important trail through the snowbanks in our yard. It led to a little group of outhouses, in one of which wood and coal were stored. On a stormy day I was the only one who enjoyed leaving the house, where old-fashioned hard-coal fires kept us cozy. Any chance seemed good to me, however, and once I, with a kid of my own age who had ventured over from his house, hit upon the idea of turning that one path into a sort of Passage Perilous.

We dug a hole three feet deep, fitted into it a thin slice of loose snow, and smoothed down the surface so that to an unsuspecting eye it looked like the rest of the trodden snow path. We admired this bit of handiwork so much that when it was finished we made its duplicate farther along the "white way." Then when all was ready we hid, expecting one of my brothers as first victim.

What was our dismay when from our place of concealment we saw my grave, judicial father walk guilelessly toward the first trap! Already we were too late to warn him even if we'd dared. We stayed where we were, while slowly, surely, the dignified and somewhat heavy figure of the Chief Justice moved on.

Plop! he went through the crust over the hole, and floundered in the snowy pit. But he wasn't a man to be easily defeated. He crawled out, looking like a snow man, and proceeded.

Thinking the trap a natural one, he went on only to fall into our second ambush. Repentant, I rushed out to give him a hand up, for this hole was deeper than the first. He refused my aid, but did not even then scold or reproach me. He hadn't caught sight of my companion, who saw no reason for revealing himself; but quietly he asked me to go back to the house with him, and there he explained in a lucid way I never forgot the difference between a true sense of humor and the false humor of hurting or frightening people with what is called a practical joke.

This was characteristic of my father, and the way he controlled his temper then made such an impression on me that

it has kept me from breaking into many a rage, just or unjust, and bawling out a mechanic or some other worker who happened to be under my orders.

When I was fourteen I made a model airplane from my plans and drawings.

It would have been ready sooner, but school took a good deal of my time—too much, I often thought, though I ate up mathematics. Besides, I had to work slowly. If my father had known what I was putting my mind to he would have feared that the law and I might never meet. I had to do my stuff by the light of a secret candle in a loft.

At last the day dawned when my miniature airplane was ready for the public which hadn't seen the glider. I invited all the scientists of the neighborhood, who were the rest of my own gang, to witness my triumph as an inventor. But it never came off.

The fact that I'd collected a crowd for the event ruined it. As the urchins elbowed their way near my small airplane one of them somehow got a severe push and stepped on the model, completely wrecking it.

I think no grown man could see his life's ambition break before his eyes and feel worse than I felt. But I had to gather myself together and begin again.

To console the kids for their disappointment, soon after I asked them to witness their first parachute jump. I was the jumper, and the parachute was a huge sun umbrella. I'd resurrected it from our storehouse and cut away the cloth round the central axis so as to let the air escape. This, I'd read in my books about flight, was necessary in parachuting.

My high stage was a hay loft, and I assembled my audience underneath. Proudly I unfolded my " 'chute," but as I looked down at the ground I felt a presentiment that this thing wasn't going to be a success. Something I'd read came back to me. Parachutes often failed to open even in falls of hundreds of feet. Yet—well, I couldn't let down my friends twice running. It was up to me to give an exhibition; and I really don't think I was afraid, for I never experienced the ordinary fears of childhood. My horrors were of the imagination, such as those brought by nightmare and waking visions. (For instance, I was always seeing two dark-colored crosses standing before me at a distance in the sky. Now I've got their copies in miniature, one under each arm. The scars came from a fire stunt in which I practically burned to death. But that was years after my parachute experiment.

I may have hesitated a minute, wondering if I could think of a bigger height to choose, when one of the boys yelled, "You're afraid!"

That settled it!

I stepped farther back into the barn itself, figuring that, with a running leap, I could get more wind pressure under the " 'chute." I little knew how the wind banked up inside a parachute!

"One-two-three!" and I ran for the open loft door. Holding the 'chute far out and above my head, I jumped.

For part of a second it seemed like success. But in the following part of that second the umbrella collapsed, turning wrong side out, and I dropped straight as a plummet.

The next thing I knew my mother was bending over me.

She was sobbing and crying and I didn't have breath enough or wit enough to explain that I was the victim of a scientific experiment.

Poor mother, how she suffered for me, not then alone, but often—and I suppose will always suffer!

I knew a woman who said when her boy climbed trees she "fell from every branch." My mother makes higher falls than that these days, I'm afraid. And once when I was a baby she saved my life at the risk of her own and the cost of many terrible burns when our house caught fire and she was alone there with me. Her eyebrows and lashes and all her beautiful long hair caught fire, and most of her clothes burned, scorching her flesh when she lost her way in the smoke, her child in her arms. One would say I was too young at the time to remember this experience, yet it must be that I recall it subconsciously. In my fire stunts and accidents now, occasionally I seem to see this old picture. I don't like fire.

II

A MAIDEN FLIGHT

I WANTED to be an aviator, but my father thought otherwise. He put his foot on that ambition, as my kid friend put a foot on the model plane.

I resigned myself to be a lawyer, and when I left school at sixteen for the University of Minnesota I meant to work hard and qualify for that profession. I couldn't interest myself seriously, though, in anything but mathematics. My brother, A. G., only five years my elder, was associate professor of sociology and anthropology. He let me alone and never tried to "boss" me, so I was free to go on with mathematics. But maybe I shouldn't have gone far if it hadn't been for a certain Miss Thorpe. She was one of the best of the university professors, and seeing I was keen she encouraged me, giving me lessons in her own home, so that I was able to major in mathematics. I owe her part of any success I may have made in the air, for a working knowledge of mathematics is needed not only in "stunt" crack-ups, but in the organization which prepares them.

When I went home to Dakota for my first summer vacation my father must have been disappointed with my progress along legal lines, but he asked few questions and left the subject of my future alone. So did I, but I thought

of little else. And then something happened which made the desire of my life come true.

I went alone to a county fair at a town not far off, and there was a professional flier, a civilian named Roberts, doing airplane stunts which would be nothing now, but were good then, and gave me a real thrill.

I strolled up near the plane and stared. Roberts saw me. He was a grown man but hadn't forgotten what it felt like to be a boy. He noticed me as he might have noticed a pup wagging its tail for a bone. The pup got the bone, in the shape of a word and grin from the godlike flier.

He let me talk for hours, and answered a hundred questions. But at last he had to get rid of me.

"Well, it's about time to take off," he said, and my face must have fallen several inches out of plumb, for suddenly he asked, "How would you like to go round with me as my assistant, making the fairs? That's my job for the rest of the summer."

I thought I must be dreaming, but I wasn't.

"What about it?" he repeated, and while answering as quietly as I could, "Sure, you bet I'd like it," I came to a decision. I would go with him, even if my parents objected. Nothing should prevent me from having this experience.

But I didn't need to defy my father and mother. Seeing how my heart was set on the adventure, they consented, hoping most likely that I might get fed up with the whole darn business.

The matter was settled in a few hours, and next day I had a good look at Roberts's ship. It was an old pusher type, but compared to it the throne of England would

have been mud to me. I fussed around until I must have been more of a hindrance than a help to Roberts.

Through the rest of the summer I scrubbed that old boat's wings and cleaned its motor, never tiring or getting bored. It seemed so reliable I would never have thought it could let us down!

However, that is what it did. In one of Roberts's ordinary stunts the motor quit, and there was a terrific smash. Even though the high speed of the ship was but fifty miles an hour, Roberts was badly hurt. He would be incapacitated for some time, which meant the cancelling of several good contracts. To me, a boy, it looked like a fortune lost.

Roberts wasn't much more cheerful than I was, even when a brilliant idea popped into my head. Why couldn't I, under his instructions and with the aid of hired workers, rebuild the damaged ship?

He agreed that this was a good plan, and as I was carrying it out a voice would whisper, "Why can't you take the ship up?"

I knew I was capable of controlling it after all I'd learned; and maybe my childish experiments and failures had given me something, before I began picking up practical knowledge from Roberts. What was the use of working with a real flier months on end, even sitting in the seat sometimes to taxi the contraption in and out of the Fair tents that were our hangars, if I weren't able by now to fly the ship? Why, I knew the controls as I knew the inside of my hat, though I'd never been off the ground.

I mustered courage, when the plane was fully repaired and Roberts still out of action, to propose the plan to him.

He was crippled and so were his contracts, but he also crippled my ambition. Hell, no, he couldn't trust a blankety-blank kid with his valuable property!

I had to give in, for the ship was his, not mine, but I felt pretty sick. So the matter might have ended if one of the men with whom Roberts had contracted for an exhibition hadn't come to see him, and seen me first. I don't know how it was, but my confidence in myself must have lit up some spark in him, for he advised Roberts to give me a chance, being anxious not to disappoint the home folks. Also he offered extra pay if the stunt came off.

Roberts called me in and repeated the conversation. "Try the ship," he said. "If I see you can make a good take-off and a good landing, why I may trust you for the exhibition."

We didn't waste any time, for the thing had to be decided. If Roberts couldn't keep his contract, the first on his list after his crash, someone else would have to be found and signed up.

He limped out to his makeshift hangar with me, and I think his face showed more worry wrinkles than the Pacific Ocean has waves!

To climb into the seat and strap myself there was easy. Then the motor was going, and almost mechanically I taxied down the field, with help on each wing tip. So far so good, but what if I crashed and ruined Roberts's ship?

Well, it was too late to change my mind, and luckily the instant I faced into the wind I felt a confidence in myself I had never felt before. There was an exultation mixed

with it which I had never known. Sitting out there in front with the ground so close to me, I knew I could do it.

The steady purr of the motor was music, and then I gave it the gun. The plane moved. It was travelling along the ground fast now. One wing dipped dangerously, and I moved the ailerons quickly to counteract. Then it dipped on the other. I remembered the advice of the expert. "Be careful of overcontrol. Keep good speed always. Don't try to climb; it will do that itself." Then the wheels bounced and I was off.

For the first few seconds I didn't know what was happening, till the natural "feel" seemed to come to me, and after a few erratic miles I decided to bank.

Soon I began wondering why everyone considered this flight thing such a scientific accomplishment. Presently I found out. I was still in the air, but I had yet to learn that landing was the most difficult of all tasks. A ship will almost take itself off, nearly fly by its ownsome—but landing!

I came in with the poor wires whistling and singing, and when I thought the thing had lost its flying speed I drew back rather suddenly on the controls. Immediately I shot up like a skyrocket. Fortunately I gave it the gun and nosed the machine earthward, thus avoiding a stall.

After a few gulps and a couple of sighs, again I turned earthward. The wheels hit first, then the tail, then the wheels, then tail. In fact, I made five perfect landings. Never did I ride a bucking broncho that was rougher. After those five landings I got all of it on the ground together and turned to Roberts, who limped toward me.

I braced myself for a scolding, and expected to be called a this and that, a thus and a so—such words as I had heard the flier shout at others. Instead, his face beamed.

"Good kid! Knew you'd do it. A little sloppy, but it's still all together. Natural flier. Guess you'll have a job next year—not with me."

He put his arm around my shoulder and led me into the tent hangar, where he dragged forth a bottle of Scotch and offered me a stiff drink in an old tin cup. I had never tasted the stuff, and didn't like it. It was not in use at our home. But I wanted to oblige him. I took one small sip, then coughed and choked until I had to spit it out.

At that time I had never smoked, drunk, danced, or kissed a girl. I did not even drink tea or coffee.

I can still say I don't drink coffee.

III

THE FIRST UNIT OF DUNWOODY

College again!

But war clouds were black over the whole world, and in 1916 I wanted to go across with the Canadians, or, though I was under fighting age, try to join the Lafayette Escadrille.

I got off my feed and study, but A. G., my professor brother, snubbed me by saying children weren't wanted over there. Suddenly, however, he decided that he couldn't bear to say out of the scrap himself. This was when America went in, and with A. G. gone there was no influence to hold me back. I didn't consult my parents before I decided that I would enlist.

What I wanted was a commission, because without one I couldn't hope to fly. But A. G. wasn't the only person who called me too young. The army wouldn't have me.

That was a blow, but not a knockout. I presented myself at the U. S. Naval Recruiting offices, where a hard-boiled C. P. O. looked me over from head to foot.

"Not taking any enlistments," he growled, and turned back to his work.

I was dumbfounded, for I had only just stepped over the doorsill.

I stood where I was till someone brushed me out of his

way, a buzzard of about thirty-five. "Aw hell, what are you taking up room for there?" he grunted. "Somebody else might want to use what you're standing on." Still I hung on, watching the man stride across to the desk, sign up, and go in for a "physical." Others shoved past me and followed his example. Mine was the only spot on the scene that wasn't busy getting ready for war.

At last I grew so mad that I didn't care what any hard-boiled C. P. O. might do to me. I butted into the front of the line.

"See here!" I barked. "You've got to give me a good reason why I'm not fit for your lousy navy!"

Everyone except the C. P. O. grinned or stared at the impudent shrimp. He scowled. "Run home to your mamma, sonny," he ordered. "Come back when you grow up."

"All right, if that's how bad you need aviators for the American service," I said, "I'll go somewhere else, where I can get in."

"Aviators!" the C. P. O. laughed. "What *you* need is a toy balloon."

I saw red. "You—you——" I stuttered. "You're just a low-down——"

Which is where that conversation ended.

A man with three full gold stripes walked out from an inner office, evidently bound for the desk. Catching my outburst, he halted. So did I—in my language.

He looked down at me. I looked up at him. He was tall, and I hadn't quite got my growth. I'll never forget that fine dignified figure, or that stern yet not unkind face. It seemed to me that this man's smile lines were made of steel.

Without budging from the spot where my impudence had stopped him, a commanding gesture of the hand beckoned me to approach.

"What's your trouble, son?" He focussed his eyes at me.

"Well——" I stumbled. "Well, it——"

"Come on, now," the officer cut in. "I'm busy. Never start with a 'well' or end with a 'but.' "

"I want to get into aviation, sir," I said.

For a minute he stood looking me over. Then his hard face softened slightly. "Come into my office," he ordered, leading the way. I lingered behind just long enough to give a thumb and five full fingers to the C. P. O., who half rose, a beautiful scowl adorning his leathern features.

Inside the commander's office, which was luxurious compared to the outer one of the C. P. O., I was directed to sit down.

"Now, what about this aviation?" the commander questioned me. "Want to enlist?"

"I do, sir," I answered.

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-one," I risked.

The commander grinned slightly as he looked me well over again.

"Unofficially," he prompted me, "how old are you?"

"I—might be nineteen," I hedged, my ears burning.

"Now—really how old are you?"

There was no use in lying to such a man! I knew my face was red as a beet when I told him the truth.

He made no comment, but went on. "Any flying experience?"

"Very little that would do me good in the service, sir," I explained. "But I have flown." And I painted my hectic past with Roberts, "making" the fairs with the old pusher.

"Parents mind if you enlist?" came next.

"They'd love it," I fibbed, almost seeing how my poor mother would take this bombshell.

The colonel lifted the receiver from a desk 'phone. "Hello, Lieutenant Eastman!" he called. "I'm sending you a recruit for aviation instruction. A little experience. Put him in the First Unit."

Bang!—I was in the service.

Steps were rapid in those days.

A little ground-school instruction, and then I was sent to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. After that it was Pensacola, and finally a commission.

The ace of our unit (the First Unit of Dunwoody) in my opinion was Goldie Sylvester. All of us in the unit became friends, but Sylvester was the top card in the pack. I looked up to him because he'd already been over in France, serving with the Morgan Harjes Ambulance Corps, where he had won a Croix de Guerre with Palms and other decorations. We two in our planes would hunt each other out in the sky and play formations.

One day Goldie called me quietly aside and told me he'd overheard a conversation between our superior officers wherein it was decided that I should be held as an instructor. This made me sick. I was crazy to get over to France. I'd enlisted for action, not teaching, and I swore that at any cost I wouldn't be stuck in America.

I took to the air to think the thing over in peace, and just

then Sylvester was taking off in squadron formation, having Position No. 2 on the right. Blair of Philadelphia held No. 3 on the left. The others I didn't recognize. We waved to each other as we parted for our morning's flight, and when the lot of us were in the air I trailed the squadron.

I was in a tough mood over what I'd learned from Goldie. The thought of being kept back nauseated me, but soon there was something else to be sick about. Blair swerved in the propeller wash of No. 1 plane in the formation. At the same instant Sylvester seemed to veer in, and my muscles tautened as I saw their planes approach each other at high speed. The wings touched—locked. The ships' noses ground into one another, the two planes tore each other's guts. Then they dropped.

I nosed down and away from the damaged squadron, inadvertently falling into the first tailspin I was ever in. When I came out the planes had parted, about two hundred feet above the blue water. Blair jumped from his. Fatal mistake. The sharks got him. At least, his body never was found.

As for Sylvester, he nosed into the sea with terrible force, splashing up a huge white plume of spray as he hit. Already they had started the sea sled from the dock with a rescue party.

I went into a steep dive, only to see that the boat was far ahead. If anything could get to him in time it would. Still I went on. I couldn't help it. As I saw the men dragging Sylvester's body out of the wreckage he appeared to be unhurt. He must be all right, for there'd hardly been time for him to drown. Then when I came nearer I saw

that his head had been pierced by a long sliver of a propeller. He was stone dead.

For a few minutes I was stunned with grief. That sliver in his brain seemed to pierce mine too, and for the moment I almost wished it had, as I took what I thought must be a last long look at my friend. I was mistaken, however. It was not to be the last.

He had a rather unusual face, and as he lay there, open-eyed but unseeing, his features impressed themselves upon me as they never had before. Everything photographed itself on my mind: the wrinkled brown forehead, the large pores, almost like pits in his tanned cheeks, and the full, firm chin. The deep smile lines seemed determined even in death, and though they were sad there was an expression of peace which no one who saw it could forget.

Well, he at least had lived, and had had his chance to do something worth while. I hadn't, and wouldn't if what he warned me of, almost with his last words, came true. I promised myself again that it should not be so, and at that moment I made a plan. It was as if the shock of Goldie's death brought it into my mind.

Life had to go on!

After goosing my motor a couple of times I gave it full gun and took off.

An hour later I reached the altitude of five thousand feet in my seaplane and then straightened out. Deliberately I set myself to do a thing absolutely forbidden on the station—stunting in a seaplane.

It was a crime against discipline that ought to mean a court-martial and dismissal from the service which I'd

taken so much trouble to join. This sounds like fool's play. But it wasn't. I knew what I wanted to do and what I wanted to happen.

I looked far down upon our hangars. They, and everything in the miniature station where they expected to keep me as an instructor while others went to war, seemed of no account, though I knew well enough that all would gain in importance, as in size, the nearer I got. *I* would be the little and unimportant object. But I didn't care!

I dived and looped, spun and climbed and banked until the old motor just wheezed and died. A forced landing! Yet I nosed not into the wind but with it, toward the landing beach. My finish was perfection. Not a bounce; and more gold braid was lined up there as spectators than I'd ever before seen assembled.

Icily the group eyed me, as with the most casual air I could muster I jumped from the pontoon of the ship to the shore. The senior flying officer sternly ordered me to report to the executive officer, and he in his turn sent me to the captain's office.

In my dirty flying clothes, my face bespotted with engine mud, I must show myself before the Grand Old Man! But I had let myself in for what was due, and though I didn't enjoy it I had no regrets. This was the one and only time when I wasn't obliged to wait and cool my heels in an outer office. Without a moment's delay I was ushered into the presence of my very austere superior. And "austere" was the word!

His hair was almost white. A rather becoming Vandyke beard adorned his dignified features. There was something

about him which told of clean living. His eyes were clear and keen as an eagle's.

"Sit down, Ensign Grace," he commanded. And these were his only words for a while. Leaning back in his swivel chair, the G. O. M. looked me squarely and very thoughtfully in the eye in stone-cold silence till I began to wriggle. Under that gaze I felt like an undressed model on display in a shop window. But presently he leaned forward to study some reports on the desk. From them he turned to a small book. I knew it was my service record.

Still without speaking, he half turned from me and gazed contemplatively out of the window on the vast rows of hangars and machine shops.

"Ensign Grace," he said at last, "your record is clean up to the present. I see no serious infraction of any rule of the navy in your past. Yet to-day you have committed an offense against discipline which can't be overlooked. Your life is not your own at present. It belongs to your country. You know very well that seaplanes aren't built for stunting. You must realize as I do that you are guilty of an act which is unfair to me as a brother officer."

"Yes, sir," I admitted.

"Then what is your excuse, if any?"

"I want a court-martial," I answered, giving him look for look.

"A court-martial?" he repeated, astounded.

"Yes, sir, and a conviction and a discharge."

"You talk like an insane man!"

"To-day I heard that I was to be made an instructor and have to stay here. I want to go to France! The one

chance I can see of doing that is to be discharged and try to get into the R. F. C."

He made no comment upon this statement. He bent again over the papers. "You are confined to quarters until further notice," he said without a change of expression.

I went out disheartened, realizing that my plan might have failed after all. It was a cinch for a court-martial! *But* a court-martial would do me no good if the sentence should ground me forever. I needed to fly if I were to get to France.

For three days I moped. No one came to see me. I felt like a prisoner. Then, at the close of the third tedious day, I was recalled to the high executive's office.

The curt recognition of naval officers passed between us. I noticed a long folded document in the hand that could make or break me. Evidently the order for my trial.

"Read this," the G. O. M. commanded.

I took the paper he held out, expecting to see my worst fears confirmed. But the farther I read, the higher my astonishment mounted. This was not an order for court-martial, but a command to proceed to Washington and from there directly to Paris.

When I looked up, red and pale perhaps, the Grand Old Man was smiling.

Bang! I was in the war, as unexpectedly as I had entered the service.

IV

THE PARIS OF MANY STORIES

The war!

I was in it, but not in the way I wanted. It seemed that I was doomed to be placed with squadrons which got little or no chance of action.

It was my ambition to become an ace, not for the glory of it, but for work and adventure; just as in these days, after nine years behind the scenes for "stunt" pictures, I don't spend weeks and months in preparation with my Squadron of Death and risk my life and theirs for glory. We get little of it, but it is our life or our death, and it's worth while.

So it was in the war. Individuality was merged into the mass. A soldier or a flier was more or less comparable with one vote in a general election for President of the United States.

I was first detailed with the Northern Bombing Group stationed near Otange not far from Dunkirk. Things were too slow for us, and I began to think I had a jinx, that if I'd apply for a transfer to another squadron I'd be sure to get into a more or less dead one.

At last talk reached our ears of a big offensive on the Italian Front. That sounded good to me, and by manœuvring I got a transfer.

Before starting for Italy, however, it was necessary to report in Paris. There I would receive definite assignment.

I hurried through Paris after landing in France, but had seen nothing of the city of which we Americans had heard so many stories. Now I was to have ten days' leave with time to see the sights and enjoy myself.

One thing impressed upon my mind by Sylvester's death and countless death since was the fact that sooner or later the war was bound to "get" us—especially us aviators. None had lasted long, and none would last much longer than those who had passed on. Members of the R. A. F. in those days came on the scene only to be bumped off and replaced by others with whom the programme would be repeated. Their R. E. S.'s were nothing much but flying coffins. Even the famous Camel, which gave me a thrill because it was the trickiest and the most sensitive type on control, was far from an ideal fighting ship.

For this reason I and the rest looked forward to Paris after Dunkirk as a joy hop. It might be our last. It wasn't strange if we decided to make the most of it.

There was a strange atmosphere hanging over Paris then. Everyone must have felt it, we more than others, because it was there for us. Wherever we went, in streets, boulevards, parks, theatres, restaurants, all-night cafés, there was this heavy atmosphere. An atmosphere filled with love and hate. All kinds of love—for us.

I had never smoked. I had never drunk anything stronger than Coca-Cola, except for the one nip of Scotch that Roberts had forced down my throat. I had never kissed

a girl; in fact, only once had I tried it. I almost got the kiss, and I did get my face slapped.

Yet here I was in Paris, where all my friends had had adventures which they had painted in high colors when they came back from leave, so my curiosity was aroused and I decided to jump in and get my feet wet, too. I felt as though I had come to the gate of a garden. And I wasn't the only one among my friends who felt this way. We'd seen things that men older than ourselves had never faced and never will: but some of us were too young or too dumb for women. In Paris the gate was ajar. Why not go in?

As I was passing the Y. M. C. A. I bought some good American cigarettes and had my *first* smoke.

That night I went alone into the Café de Paris, which had been described to me by men of my squadron, and seating myself alone at a table I ordered a bottle of good dry champagne. I sipped a glassful, and poured down the second like water. After the third I felt warm all over, ready for anything that might come.

What did come was a glance, then a look, from a beautiful girl who sat at the table next to mine. She had no business casting glances, for she was with a Frenchman, a civilian, one of her own compatriots. But I suppose a girl feels she has a right to do what she likes with her own eyes.

Little as I knew about women, I did have the sense to understand that this girl, so quiet, so simply yet smartly dressed, wasn't of the type we could approach with "army French," and a "*Voulez-vous coucher avec moi?*" Still, the

look she did give me with those eyes was as good as a written invitation.

Perhaps she scorned her escort because he was a civilian among uniformed Allies, though doubtless there was a good reason for that, as all Frenchmen young or middle-aged, able to fight, were soldiers. Later I found out that, being an expert, he was employed in munition works near Brest; though how the girl had got herself engaged to marry him she could hardly tell.

That night, however, I knew nothing about him. He was twice my size and age, but when he saw his companion giving me glad eyes he did nothing about it except scowl.

I tried to make things comfortable all around by bowing politely, getting off a few words in my best French, and inviting the two to try my champagne instead of sticking to the red wine they had on their table. I proposed the health of France, so a Frenchman could hardly refuse. Anyhow he didn't, and he and I had a few drinks, then more when I'd ordered a second bottle of champagne. The *petite* dark-eyed dame didn't help us much, but she went on looking, until her fiancé got up and insisted on taking her away. She could speak a little English, he none at all.

I thought I'd lost her, but I was mistaken. She gave me my cue, saying that her friend could leave if he liked. She preferred to stay and drink the health of the American service, especially aviation.

I felt like a home breaker, but when I arose and offered to go Mademoiselle said "No." Monsieur flew into a rage at this, and when she threatened to move to my side of the table, with one move he upset it.

The girl and I got a bath of champagne. It was then my turn to spring up, my legs wet with wine, and I did it so brusquely that the poor Frenchie must have thought I meant to go for him. He jumped, made for the door, leaving his bill to me, to say nothing of his girl; and the last we saw of him through the big plate-glass windows, he was running as if he had an escaped tiger in pursuit.

I think the girl was really frightened. She hadn't meant to show off or make trouble. She was just tired of her pasty-faced civilian among so many uniforms, and she wanted to meet an American officer. I was her first American, as she was my first flirtation.

She wasn't bold in her manner with me, yet she made me feel she liked me partly because of myself and partly because I was one of the Americans who had come out to help France. She didn't want to part from me, and if she felt like that I didn't see why I should part from her. She was pretty, and kind, with little caressing ways which seem, as I recall them, to belong only to the Paris of those days. I went with her where she wished me to go, and stayed with her as she wished me to stay. I hope if she ever remembers me now, when perhaps she is happily married, it may be some satisfaction for the girl to know that I can never forget her or those days in which I seldom went anywhere without her.

Little Thérèse and her native Paris made a man of me.

V

MEET ITALY

After my leave I travelled to Rome only to be sent to Lago di Bolsena, where I was to be attached for temporary duty.

When I arrived I was greeted by a number of friends, including one of the best, Leonard Reno of Chicago, and we all held "another of those reunions."

I wanted to see the Lago di Bolsena from which we were to do our flying, so some of us wandered down the long lane which led to our hangars and the main station. We were billeted near an old castle of Nero's, which was interesting, but I was much surprised at the lake. It seemed so small.

"Small!" repeated Pee-Wee Laurence, one of the first Americans to blow up a submarine. "That's all your imagination. This is a deceptive piece of water, and much bigger than it looks."

I glanced across thoughtfully. "Well," I said, "maybe you're right, but at that I bet I could walk around it in twenty-four hours."

Instantly I got the horse laugh.

No one dislikes more than I do to have his judgment impeached. So, after giving them a dirty look and study-

ing the lake for a minute, I burst out with the bright remark:

"Nothing to bet that I can't do what I say?" I repeated.

Of course they couldn't sit still under this, so together they dug up six hundred lire that I wouldn't be able to win such a bet. It was then two o'clock in the afternoon, and twenty-four hours later I was due to earn or lose the six hundred.

Time came for me to start, and the German hobnailed boots which I wore were probably the only things befitting such an adventure. The rest of my clothing was a pair of worn Bedfords, a khaki shirt, and the camel's-hair lining out of my short leather coat. I had no canteen nor flashlight.

The first few miles were easy, smooth and level. Then I ran into a sort of swamp, through which I had to wade. This was bad, as the heavy boots filled up with water and rubbed my feet with every step.

These little discomforts, however, were but a beginning! Farther on a huge mountain dropped sheer, cliff-like sides into the lake. I had my choice of climbing or swimming, and chose to swim, which saved time and trouble, but when I found a landing place I was wet as a seal.

Over mountains, through streams, I wandered till about eleven at night. By that time I was a bit tired and hungry, but I figured that I must have done almost half of the distance I had to travel to win my bet, which wasn't so bad.

I was feeling fairly pleased with myself when I broke into a little village. Not used to Italian towns, language, or customs, I can hardly blame myself for mistaking a

rather superior-looking peasant house for a small restaurant.

In some countries I mightn't have received a very pleasant welcome, pounding at the door of somebody's home in the middle of the night, but the fat, middle-aged woman who peered out into the darkness took pity on me and let me in as soon as I spoke the magic password "*Americano.*"

It was one of the few I knew, but it, and the expressive gestures I made toward the region of my stomach, won me a supper. It was only after I'd drunk what seemed to me some choice wine and eaten the tastiest food I'd had since leaving home that it occurred to my hostess and a few friends who'd dropped in for the show to catechize the foreigner calling himself "*Americano*" and "*soldato,*" though he wore no uniform. We all did our best to clear up the mystery with much waving of arms and shouting, but after a parley which I couldn't understand, a deputation went out to find an interpreter. They thought it worth while to wake up the mayor of the village, who could speak English and especially American, having been a barber in Boston, Massachusetts.

I was delighted to see him, and hoped I'd found a friend, but he was quite the high Italian official now, and his Boston days didn't soften his heart toward a midnight visitor more likely to be an Austrian spy than the American soldier he claimed to be.

His reasoning was perfect, even pluperfect.

If I was an American aviator, belonging to the detachment on the other side of the lake, why the devil wasn't I

in uniform? Why a coat lining instead of a coat? Above all, why those German boots? What was I doing alone at midnight so far from my station? What military mission brought me to his town? The worthy man not being blessed with a sense of humor, my explanation of the bet and my attempt to win six hundred lire did more harm than good. My story was too far-fetched. If I had made up a simple lie I'd have had a better chance of selling myself to him.

He wanted to march me off to jail, but my hostess, who seemed to be on friendly terms with His Honor the mayor, interceded for me. I looked like a real American to her, and anyhow I was tired out and not dangerous. She pleaded that it would be all right to lock me up in a bedroom in her house, where I'd have a good night's rest, and next morning if necessary I could be dragged to prison or even shot at dawn.

At last her eloquence convinced the mayor, or wore him out, but he insisted on seeing for himself that a stout door was shut on me and the key turned in the lock.

There was nothing to do but submit to the law and bide my time. I was thankful that I hadn't to pass the night in a lousy village jail, but I wasn't as cheerful as I seemed. Not only would I lose my bet, which was certain now, but at best, if I were set free in the morning I couldn't get back to my station till late the next night, and there'd be the devil to pay.

I sat on a clean-looking bed to think over the situation and wonder what, if anything, could be done, especially about the window, when I heard a key grate in the lock. The door opened and framed my hostess, smiling and nod-

Perfect ground for a perfect crash at 90 m. p. h. No Man's Land.
From WINGS.

ding. She was not alone. With her were two young girls, evidently her daughters. At first I couldn't understand what she wanted. But some actions speak louder than words, and when I found that the girls were brought for me to choose from it was too much for my Minnesota morals. I was shocked. A minute before I'd had only two things to worry about, and both of them concerned getting back to the station. Now I had more.

I was the panic-stricken one, not the signorinas, but realizing that their ideals were just different from those at home, I tried to be polite as I waved the ladies away.

The mother of the two charmers, one of whom was really pretty, seemed to be in despair how to please the *Americano,* and offered me both girls. That was too much, and I pushed all three out, pure but panting. They retaliated by turning the key in the lock with a vicious wrench, and there I was worse off than ever.

I felt I had no time to waste, since I now had enemies instead of friends in the house, and again I concentrated on escape.

Quietly I opened the window, which had a narrow balcony underneath, and I laughed as I saw that it was no more than twenty-five feet above the cobble-paved street.

Cautiously I got out on the balcony and hung there suspended. At that hour I hoped the villagers were all at home in bed, but no: someone was out late. I heard an ungodly scream and let go. Luckily I landed on my feet, lightly despite the German boots, and stopped only long enough to decide which way to go.

From an open window my Three Graces waved their

Soon after this adventure the Big Drive came which before long, and to our great disappointment, ended the war.

Trieste changed colors. Pola was bombed. The Austrian line gave in and—the Germans gave way.

We Americans were too newly in the war to welcome the Armistice. We made a noise with the rest, but few in our sector rejoiced. We were just beginning to "go good," and felt we had been cheated because we were obliged to stop. Still, there it was! The war was over.

VI

A BUSINESS VENTURE THAT CRASHED

Out!

Nothing to do but go back to our old line of work—if we could get it.

I was due for a raise in commission. But I had had enough.

My companions and I scattered. Before our final farewell, however, we had one last flight. It was a damned fine good-bye party.

I went home to rest, but there was no rest. My back and foot were still weak from a crack-up, but I had to go to a dance every night and stay out till morning, or I would have been a Gloom among those who wanted to do me honor. I felt handicapped; and though after a while we became an old story, they tried to make much of us in the town of Bismarck, North Dakota. I was a fish out of water.

Since I'd gone to war Father had elected himself Justice of the Supreme Court of our state, and my family had moved from the little town of Mohall to the capital.

In this place I had no near friends, so the parties meant nothing much to me. Moreover, my father kept insisting that I go back to the University of Minnesota to continue my study of the law. After my hectic life in France and

Italy this was as exciting to me as a sermon on eugenics would be in a night club. I wanted to please my parents, however, after my long absence from them, so I let my father's reasoning win and I departed again to take up the humdrum existence of a law student.

When first mine eyes had beheld this university it had seemed a vast institution. But that was an age ago, before I "joined up" and entered the service. It was before the war! Then it had been life, not existence. I'd been a boy whose geography was learned from maps. Now I had wandered a long way and seen various countries and learned several things; among others, how to smoke, drink, and kiss, as well as dance at parties.

Buildings that had seemed big were small, and some I missed altogether, for they had been torn down. Memories I had treasured were destroyed with them. Whole streets I didn't recognize. And the students! What neophytes! I was an old man in comparison with them, too old to associate with them congenially. They were constrained with me. I was bored with them.

My fraternity brothers who had graduated hadn't come back from the war, or they baulked at returning to school. In the places they left empty were youngsters who enjoyed frivolities I could take no hand in. I felt homesick for I hardly knew what, and I realized what a fool I'd been in thinking, while on my way home from war, that the service had made no change in me. I knew better now. I had graduated into a life beyond what school could teach, and seeing this I resolved then and there that I would be no lawyer.

It made me unhappy to decide this, because I knew it would grieve my father, and I had no alternative profession to propose. I was restless. I couldn't see ahead. I had not the remotest idea what would become of me. But even to become a derelict would be better than staying in school, an old man half in, half out, of his own generation. Old at twenty!

Fate decrees unaccountably. Yet, if we want things enough, it often gives us what we ask. As I didn't want school with its soft memories and sweet girls, now my companions were gone, it seemed that I must stay with the only thing I knew.

I say "must" because if I hadn't felt driven I would have liked to please my father. But in the revolt of soul against convention I found aviation waiting with arms open. By accident, it seemed, I ran into my kind old commander who had just been relieved of duty at Dunwoody Institute.

If it hadn't been for him I mightn't have got into the service when I did. He also was back in civies and treated me like a human being. He recognized me at once, knew all about my war record and that of his First Unit. I was delighted when he said he was proud of us, and glad we had justified his judgment to some extent.

"What are you planning on doing now?" he asked.

"I wish I knew," I said. "But I want to keep in aviation one way or another."

A look of keen interest came over his face, which I remembered as so stern.

"Hm!" he said thoughtfully. "Got any money?—to put into an investment, I mean."

"Not much," I said. "Only what I saved in the war. A little over a thousand."

"Probably your father'd help you," the commander suggested, "if it was a question of your getting into a good thing."

Then he went on and explained what the good thing was. All was spoken casually as if he didn't care where he himself was concerned, but wouldn't be sorry to do me a kind turn. I'm sure he did feel that way.

I listened as he talked about a great commercial opportunity I might take advantage of, if I could get a few thousand dollars.

The government, it seemed, had stored huge supplies of aviation equipment in Midway, equipment which, now that the war was over, had become a useless burden. If I could put in a reasonable bid the commander was sure that it would be accepted. There were seventeen Standard J1's, three L.W.F.'s with 135 h. p. Thomas Morse motors, and a T. M. Scout to be sold. These would make a great display on any private field.

The scheme was dazzling, but the proposition seemed entirely too big for me. It would require at least five thousand dollars to bid in on the material, not counting money for hangars and a lease on a really good field.

Persuaded by my former superior, however, I telegraphed my father the details, and he offered to lend me three thousand dollars. As I had said, my war savings amounted to more than a thousand. So there was four thousand dollars: a big sum to me, but not enough to buy the ships.

Then fortune seemed to swing my way. Through the commander I met a man who was already deeply interested in the scheme; not a person of much education, but one who, nevertheless, struck me as trustworthy and sound. He had approximately the same amount of money I had with which to experiment with civilian aviation, so I had my excuse to throw law to the winds for the second time—and for the love of the game.

A few weeks later found us established in Minneapolis as partners, the first commercial company to have ships and start flying. I was very proud of that first adventure in business, at my age. These ships were *mine*—ours! How different the control of the stick on a ship of your own than to fly one belonging to the government! There was just one hangar, and our lease on the eighty-acre field was for but two years, yet we felt certain that everything would grow and the business become more and more stable as we became better known in the world.

One important detail, however, I had forgotten. A crash or two when in the service of the government meant nothing, while here the loss of one ship and some thousands of dollars was crushing to us. Fortune deserted us. A tornado overtook one of our ships, a Bemidji, and completely wrecked it. Immediately following this stroke of bad luck I was flying an exhibition at Litchfield, and the motor quit. A huge crowd swarmed over the whole field when I attempted a landing. To pick a spot where there were no spectators or automobiles was next to impossible. To do so meant a deliberate crack-up. But it was the one thing to do, and I did it. I was able to land on a small space, but

not able to stop taxiing before I came to the end of the field. The result was a crash into the board fence which surrounded the grounds, and another plane was damaged.

This happened on a Saturday, and was bad enough, but misfortunes never come singly. One week from that day I was flying an L. W. F. with the motor turning a good 2300 r. p. ms. as I left the ground. Hardly had I got beyond reach of the field, however, when the revs dropped to 1900, then to 1500. I was barely able to keep in the air. Fourteen hundred, and I started to settle. It looked like another crack-up, and, peering over the side of the ship, I was disconcerted to find myself directly over a swamp. I had a brand new pair of Bedford cord trousers on, too! "Just my luck!" I thought.

The fuselage of these former transport ships was made of laminated wood, dangerous for a smash, though the undercarriage was of steel. A crack-up it had to be, and travelling with the wind this ought to be a good one! I wasn't disappointed. The landing carriage struck first, then the nose, and I went through more stunts in the next few minutes than I'd had in the last few months.

When the crunch of breaking wood had ceased I myself was more or less detached from the rest of the ship. The fuselage had broken into three parts, and I was in that one which had rolled some thirty feet from the rest of the wreck.

This I didn't discover until I came back to my senses. I was still holding to the stick; my trousers were mud; my goggles and nose were broken, and there wasn't enough ship left even to worry over.

What I said about that motor as I touched a match to the débris must still hold a high record in language contests. I watched the blaze with grim enjoyment, and then trudged disgustedly home from the swamp.

In that mood I didn't care much for the ship, and I didn't mind getting wet. What I was damned sore about was my new Bedford cords!

It never rains but it pours. My partner and I disagreed in principle and decided to separate.

For days I worried about what to do. I couldn't separate from him until I got money enough to repay my father what he had put into the concern for me. At least I must be able to sell out for the amount of my debt to him. But who wanted to buy an aviation field that wasn't on a paying basis? Very few would be interested in such a proposition at that time in any case, even if it had been a gold mine.

The next Saturday I had another crack-up. Motor trouble again! And this time I was forced to land in a creek, which made three crack-ups in a row. I was disgruntled through and through.

When a team of horses had drawn what was left of the thing out of the mud, I had my mechanics repair it well enough to go up. But for no good purpose! As soon as they finished the job I took the ship off the ground and deliberately smashed it. That was my way of trying to break the stream of bad luck. Moreover, this airplane had nothing but its own way, it seemed. Perhaps after this I might have my way as to where and when my planes were

to crack up! I little knew how many voluntary crack-ups I was to make after this bone experiment.

Now I was at my wit's end to know how to save my father a heavy loss yet break free from my partner. Omar Locklear helped me to solve the problem.

Locklear had just begun to make fame for himself by changing from one airplane to another in midair, and I saw that there might be money for me in the same stunt. There was danger in it, of course, and the technique had to be mastered before one could hope to succeed. But something had to be done to pick up a quick return on the failing investment, so I put two of my best pilots through special training.

I taught them to fly between two tall posts, arranged much as a football standard. Across the top of these parallel posts I put a cord with small flags attached to it, so the contraption would be visible from the air. One plane must fly under the cord and the other just above it.

When the pilots had done this trick several times I made them repeat with the same formation, higher in the air and with me on the wing of one plane. When I had had enough practice we gave out an announcement that we would do a change from one airplane to another.

So far Locklear had this stunt for himself, and we were going to be his only rivals, so the newspapers took the story up and "featured" my pilots and me.

We advertised the show for a certain day, and though our poor field was so new that people hadn't seemed to know where it was, all of a sudden they found their way.

A crowd of at least ten thousand collected to see us give our demonstration of foolhardiness.

I was elated at this sight and thought my luck had changed. All our ships used for passenger work were so busy that the motors never stopped except to refill with gasoline and oil. But at the last minute, when we were all ready to give our show before twenty thousand eyes, one of my pilots deliberately backed out. I begged and pleaded, tried to force him, but nothing I could say or do would persuade him to risk his bones. Finally I accused him of being a coward. "You're yellow!" I challenged him, but he only shrugged his shoulders.

I was desperate, and tried to find another pilot willing to attempt the stunt at this short notice. Finally I got one who had the guts, but not the experience. So erratic was his formation flying that we couldn't make a connection between the two planes, and in order not to disappoint the crowd I gave an exhibition of wing-walking. Also I did my famous "thirty-four stunts below five hundred," and our public's thirst for sensation was more than satisfied.

What I did was new and a bit different from Omar Locklear's work; but since then I have made one hundred and sixty-seven changes from airplane to airplane, airplane to automobile, and such like, and consider that sort of thing a stunt of no spectacular value at all.

At the time it was good enough to draw crowds, and soon our field was earning enough to pay our debts. When I could arrange to sell out I did, but still I couldn't return to my father all he had put into my enterprise.

I had to think up some other schemes not to let him down.

Virtue may be its own reward, but sometimes it seems to get no other!

When I had freed myself from my partner, down pounced bad luck on me again.

I started a small field of my own in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, where, after building the field and hangar and placing the rest of my equipment, I opened a series of exhibitions on the lines of my late success. But one crack-up after another dogged my course in the air. As I was taking off a field in Stanley, Wisconsin, the old accident happened: my motor quit, and I was forced to descend on stump ground. The first two or three stumps I avoided, but eventually one got me, and I flopped over on my back. This was by now no new sensation, and I had taught myself to say, whenever it occurred, "Happy landing!" Any landing, when you can get up and walk out of it, is good. But these crack-ups I continued to have were inconvenient to a young business man.

One that followed the stump incident crowned me King of Crack-ups in that part of the country. It happened at Richmond, and I'll never forget the morning when I flew in.

Eight below zero it was. Once more during the afternoon exhibition my motor chose to quit when I was on my back in a loop. This isn't a particularly pleasant sensation when you're over a city. As I did not have much altitude there was but little time for me to pick out a field. Another crack-up—and this was a pip.

I selected one of those little buildings which James

Whitcomb Riley made famous, and I landed. What I did to the little house out in back is nothing to what the little house out in back did to me.

This disgusted me with flying, so I sold the ship where it was buried, and for no reason in particular bought a ticket to Los Angeles.

VII

AN IMPERFECT LANDING

Hell's bells!

People talk of the pleasure of riding trains between one coast and another. I swore then that if I ever made enough money I'd go straight to a Turkish bath and glorify myself just in memory of those two days and nights across the desert. The one pleasure I got out of the trip was watching a fat woman across the aisle perspire more than I. And *did* she? Every time she stood up she got her feet wet.

Thank the gods I wasn't in the same seat with her. Bad enough as it was! A day coach I was in; hot, dusty, full of careless people. They were careless in everything, particularly as to where they threw their well-gnawed apple cores, and where they parked their feet.

But at last—or alas—this was Los Angeles. Apparently I wasn't greeted by the best section of the city, but it was one in keeping with my own personal appearance. At least, there would be a place to walk, where I wasn't shut up with a combination salad of garlic, onions, and shoes which had at least one fifth of the five senses I possessed.

Arriving at a destination has its advantages, but I

couldn't appreciate them fully. I didn't know a soul, had nowhere to go, and was slightly handicapped by the fact that I had twenty cents and a suitcase to carry.

The case was decrepit. It had been through the war and, like most other things subjected to that experience, suffered more than normal deterioration. I decided to discard it. So, rambling through the waiting room, I found a newspaper, took a suit and a few accessories from my one piece of baggage, and wrapped them carefully. The bundle was small compared with the suitcase. I gave my battered property one last look, then abandoned it and started for the street. Fifty feet farther on a black hand clutched my arm.

"Here you is, mister—you-all sure 'nuff most forgot it dat time"—and a colored man triumphantly held out that darned suitcase. My delight in receiving it was no greater than his in giving it, as I walked away without tipping him.

What to do with the blamed nuisance I didn't know, but I determined that, rather than lug it all around town, I'd get rid of the pest somehow. I walked on up the street; then, standing close to one of the big pillars stuck onto the façade of the station, I gently planted the suitcase on the cement. This done, glancing cautiously in all directions, I stuffed my hands in my pockets and sauntered to a safety zone.

"Hey, you!" Without a doubt the salutation was addressed to me. And I couldn't mistake the calling of the saluter. He was a policeman.

"Well?" I asked with the air of confidence I might have

assumed a few years ago while serving as an officer in aviation.

"I been watching you. What's your game? Blowing up the station?"

"What the hell do you mean?"

"Come on—let's go over and get that suitcase. I saw you sneak it onto the pavement."

Somehow I didn't like the grip with which the officer held me as we recrossed the street.

"Open it!"

I did so.

"Close it!"

Done!

"Now, listen—what's the game?"

"Why I——"

"How much money you got?"

"How much does it take?"

"Oh—gonna get smart? Guess you'd better come with me."

"Listen," I pleaded, "I *wasn't* getting fresh. I just arrived——"

"You've already arriven."

And we went.

About ten of his comrades pounced on me at the other station, and after they had my twenty cents and everything else they could find, one of them said to another:

"Book him a 'vag.' "

"What's a 'vag'?" I asked innocently.

"Thirty days—in Los Angeles."

"But I'm going to make this my home."

"Book him 'suspicious character.' "

That was a bad day, the day of my entrance into Los Angeles. It looked as if they might have done without the first fifty per cent. of the name of the city, as far as I was concerned, for the next few weeks.

And both the officers and myself were right.

Thirty days later I emerged into the California sunlight again and the centre of the city. But I couldn't brag about my travelling time. It had taken me a month just to get from one station to another.

There's one thing I'll say, however, for that bunch of cops. They were honest. They gave me back my twenty cents—and the suitcase. This time I left all my clothes in it, though I eyed it with a certain amount of disdain. That damn thing had cost me thirty days in jail! Which ought to prove a warning for anyone who travels with luggage to southern California.

But the twenty cents was shot. A dime of it took me to Hollywood. A nickel went for some grapes. And three cents for a paper. The rest of my capital I pocketed for a rainy day.

One corner seemed almost as good as another. But I picked one that had slightly the best of it and walked unconcernedly about, the suitcase in one hand, a bag of grapes in the other, and the want ads under my arm.

My clothes were still badly in need of a press, the last neat semblance of a crease having passed away amid the luxuries of the city bastille. The hat was still stiff with the

dust of a dozen states. Altogether my appearance must have been impressive, for everyone gave me the once-over.

I had often reflected during my career that it never rains but it pours, which is just what it did at that particular moment. Without warning, a lousy cloud vomited unwelcome torrents of H_2O, placing me in the embarrassing position of having my best suit subjected to a wet wash.

There were no buildings of importance near—that is, none had inset entrances or awnings down. Luckily, however, a couple of hundred feet along the street I saw a house with an imposing veranda. In attempting a landing, I skidded, nosed over, and wiped out my undercarriage. When I regained control one hand was busily engaged replacing shirts, ties, and socks in that ——!! suitcase, while the other was extricating itself from the bag of squashed grapes.

Quite a crowd had gathered to see this spectacular landing of mine. Even the veranda was well populated. I couldn't blame people for laughing—perhaps I'd have done the same thing if I'd been in their pants; but for the life of me I could see little or no humor in the situation. My underwear was wet where I'd flopped, and I'd skinned a knee. More than that, I was outraged. My luck was so rotten—I was such a jinx—that I had to bring rain to California in July.

The longer I stood, nonplussed, the louder grew the guffaws—but upon looking the mob over I decided that they were too many and too big for me to take on alone, so I continued to stand. Meanwhile the water was trickling down my shoes, and I felt nervous and jumpy.

My eyes, having taken in the immediate surroundings, then extended their rambles and came in contact with this inscription:

THE WILLIAM FOX WEST COAST STUDIOS

VIII

FROM PROPERTY TO STUNT MAN

When I started west from Wisconsin I didn't know why I chose Los Angeles, unless because I'd heard a lot about the place and it had a nice name. Certainly I had no intention of breaking into motion pictures. As for aviation, I meant to leave it alone forever.

Still, with my present capital I couldn't exactly retire. Here Fate had marched me up in front of a big studio. As long as I was at the front door I might as well walk in and try to sell myself.

I noticed that a number of men who got in wore ridiculous make-ups. They had rouge on their lips and black around the eyes. The majority had their faces covered with a rather dark pink grease paint. I had none of this paraphernalia, but luckily there were some who didn't wear make-up and most of these were dressed as shabbily as I was.

Knowing now how hard it is for a stranger to get into a studio, I wonder at my own nerve. Empty pocketbooks and no place to sleep, however, sort of change a disposition.

I walked into the reception room, right past the gateman and on to the lot. Of course I didn't know where I was going, and I had that darned old suitcase. Only to look

at the thing made me ill. While I stood there with it in my hand, not quite sure what to do, who should pop out of nowhere but Jasper Blystone. "Jap," as we called him, was a friend from Eau Claire, and if you don't think I was glad to see him at this turning point of my career it's because you've never been up four thousand feet without wings.

He was equally glad to see me; asked what I was doing, where I was flying, and so forth. To this I answered with a fair amount of truthfulness. As for him, it seemed that he acted as property man for his brother Jack Blystone, who at the time was directing Slim Summerville in two-reel comedies.

Jasper introduced me to the troupe, and thirty minutes later I had my first job—that of an assistant property boy!

I want to say here and now that no job is so tough as that of a property man in a comedy company. He is first at work and last to leave; and when there's nothing else for him to do there's always a make-up to put on for a few hours.

People who are not satisfied with their positions in life have only to wish, and work hard enough, and I believe a change will come to them. I was ambitious to get on in the world and reach one of those high marks for which others strove. Well, I got the opportunity.

To go from the property room to the wardrobe department it was necessary to pass the sky backing. One of the companies was making a thriller which called for a forty-foot net dive. The cameras were set in position. Everything was in readiness for the stunt man to do his leap. He was

supposed to turn over twice in the air before he hit the net. Now I had never had any training in acrobatics, except what I needed for wing-walking, but I had been able to do fancy diving in college. Therefore I thought it would interest me to see the technique of a real performer.

The director gave the word. Cameras started to grind. But the stunt man still stayed where he was. A second call from the director had no more effect. No fall was forthcoming. Cameras stopped. A lot of warm talk followed: all from the director. The man on the platform didn't say a word, but with a rather hopeless gesture he turned and walked slowly down the ladder. He was through! He knew it and so did I, even though I was a novice in the game.

Of a sudden my heart beat faster. Why should I not try the stunt? It appealed to me. It would be a thrill, especially as it was a tough spot for a tryout. One man had failed, and he a professional, whereas I knew nothing of flip-flops, front or back flips. If I failed to deliver the goods I, too, would be through.

I met the stunt man as he hit the last step of the ladder and asked him for the double's coat. My trousers were a near enough match to get by. When I was dressed I ran up the ladder to the platform.

"All ready?" I shouted.

The assistant looked at the director, and the director at the assistant. They held a short consultation. "Jump when I give you the word." The order came floating up to me and the director sat down in his chair.

The cameras clicked again. I was getting nervous;

almost wished I hadn't been so quick in my decision. Then I heard that one fatal word, "Jump!"

When I got it I was so startled that one foot slipped off the stand. The next minute I went tumbling and turning, down toward the net. As I gathered speed I felt that thrill, right in the belly, which only a high fall can give. And just about the time I was beginning to enjoy it I hit the net.

There are accidents that kill and others that save. Unaccountably I hit to perfection, square on my back between the shoulders and the base of the spine. No one was more surprised than I was, as I got up slightly bewildered.

"Great!" cried the director. "That's the most natural fall I've ever seen on the lot. Most of them look too professional. There'll be no retake on that!"

Then turning to me he asked, "What's the name?"

"Dick Grace."

"Funny, I've never seen you work before. Who you working for?"

"William Fox."

"Oh, yeh! Well, you're working for the St. John Company from now on."

And I was. Immediately I slipped the word to Jasper Blystone—and then and there I "exchanged titles."

From that time on I was a Hollywood stunt man.

IX

INITIATION TO THE DEATH SQUADRON

I look back now on that pitiful stunt with a smile; it was really so simple to do and had such a small margin of risk. But it did give me confidence and excited me to greater daring.

I trained. I learned how to do high net dives. My sense of balance was always good, but from my comrades I learned how to handle my body while in the air. Malvern, Cornelli, and Eddie Tacoma, the best tumblers on the coast, took infinite pains to teach me their tricks.

Out of their competent hands I emerged as a high diver for nets and water. I was something of an equilibrist and race driver; also I was a good swimmer both on top and under the water. My aviation work in the war and after had made me a pilot of some ability and an aërial trapezist.

In consequence of all this I found no difficulty in getting work. During my first year at Hollywood I averaged about one hundred stunts, or almost two a week. In this number I include only the dangerous ones. There were others which held little element of risk for a trained man, and so are not worth counting.

After that successful year I was completely broken in, but not broken up. I had smashed only two ribs in the

whole twelve months, which I considered exceptional luck.

That year of experience made me decide never again to do any small stunts. I'd leave those for amateurs, having now graduated from the rank and file. By the end of the twelfth month I had divided stunts into two classes: major thrills, such as changing from one airplane to another and from airplane to automobile and speedboat; wrecking of automobiles; any high or fire dive above fifty feet; and intentional crashing of airplanes.

Minor stunts included dives under fifty feet in which there was no element of danger. Such an ordinary thrill as a "wire stunt," in which a man is suspended in a leather belt attached to a long piece of steel piano wire, to swing from place to place, is small stuff. I banned it for myself. Also the automobile chases, used so often in comedies. The last of these which I did consent to do required me to jump from one taxicab to another several times while the two taxis were making between twenty-five and thirty miles per hour.

Another similar stunt had me standing on top of an automobile making about the same speed. The camera car travelled parallel with us and the automobiles were about thirty feet apart. Such shots are called "running inserts." At a given signal I jumped from the top of one car to the pavement, landing flat on my chest. Of course I was partly able to break the fall with the hands; but four times I had to do this in order to get what seemed to the director a satisfactory result.

As for skidding automobiles on wet pavements, at the end of that first year I refused them, too, unless there was

a worth-while crash at the end, or unless I did the thing for pleasure. Naturally there is a technique in such skids, and my technique had improved with practice, although it had cost me about a hundred dollars to perfect it. The money wasn't paid to an instructor, but to the police department.

This little incident happened in San Pedro, on one of the main thoroughfares. Because it was midnight there was little or no traffic, and rain was pouring down in torrents. What better time could there be, I thought, to practise a few skids? Maintaining a speed of fifty miles per hour, whenever I came to an intersection I pushed on the brakes, making the car turn dizzily. It rather vexed me because I couldn't go completely around more than three and a half times at the first corner I tried. I repeated the experiment at the next, but imagine my dismay when I looked back and caught sight of two motorcycle policemen. A cinch to be arrested! But now that I was fairly caught why not get the worth of my money through some more experience? I treated myself to another skid at the next corner, and the policemen, fearing to come too close because of my gyrations, continued to signal me with arms and sirens. I thought I saw quite an angry expression on one of their faces as once more I did the trick. That time was the last. I succeeded in making the four ground loops, but my motor died.

Small stunt as this was, I firmly believe that a knowledge of skidding is invaluable to any motorist, because a car is no more out of complete control in a skid than an airplane is in a tailspin. However, where and when to get

The care-free smile that cheats the Reaper.

practice remains a problem. I'll say that I never skidded after that incident unless I got paid for it.

One more resolve I made at the end of the first year. Besides that of giving up minor thrills I decided not to stunt for comedy companies, since they cannot afford to pay prices in accordance with the real value of the feat.

It was shortly after making such resolutions that I was hired by the Fox Company for an eighty-six-foot high dive from the Rainbow Arch. This natural archway is situated on the Island of Santa Cruz.

In the picture I was doubling for Henry Walthall, and as I remember the story, this was supposed to be a suicide leap. Actually it was that, for unknown to me the stunt had to be done under treacherous conditions. Such affairs are generally blind to us stunt men, as we have no time to survey the situation before we take a thing on, and sign the contract.

Arriving at the island, John Ford (who was directing) and I got into a little power boat. We had with us the crew necessary to shoot the scene, and immediately we headed for the arch. It was then I learned that I wasn't to dive from the arch itself, but from a cliff which formed an L with it. I did not like this because the ocean breeze funnelled into the arch, causing peculiar air currents near the concave base of the cliff from which I was to dive. Then again, as I surveyed the sea and measured the depth at the time of tide when I was to do the stunt, I found the water would be only six feet deep. Below was a jagged, rocky sea bottom. If I waited until a wave surged under and through the arch I would have rather deeper water,

but I couldn't be sure of this slight advantage. The surface was covered with seaweed. Instantly I remembered how Bobby Dunn had been hurt by a mere match floating on the surface of a tank.

However, I climbed the mountain to look the thing over from the top. There was an old diving board, whose presence surprised me very much. Certainly no nut would choose this as a place to do high dives! Later I found that it had been built by a movie company a couple of years ago for the same stunt which I now faced. Also I discovered that but two persons had ever attempted the thing. One was a professional woman diver who broke seven vertebræ when she hit, and the other was a native who was killed in the attempt.

I glanced at the springboard and asked if it would be all right for me to use it for the picture, the cliff not being vertical. The rocks bellied out about twenty feet from the top and then, as I have said, curved inward near the base. John Ford agreed that I might use the board, and I was on the point of stepping out on it to look the situation over further, when I decided to test the thing before venturing my weight on it. Leaning forward, I grabbed hold of the board with one hand. Imagine my consternation when it broke back with such ease that I was almost thrown off my balance. Had I stepped out on it I would have crashed down on the cliff, rolled, and fallen the rest of the way to the water. A narrow escape! It wasn't like most of us stunt men to test such a board, which one would certainly not expect to find dry-rotted. But a sudden rush of caution to the head has saved me on several occasions!

Final preparations for the dive were made. The cameras were set up in a launch anchored about a hundred and fifty feet from the cliff. An expert diver in bathing suit stood by in a rowboat manned by a powerful athlete. In the boat was a lead-weighted rope and a life preserver. These precautions were taken in case I should hit wrong and be stunned or injured. Also, should I hit the rocks below and not come to the surface, the rope would be useful! It could be lowered over the side near my body and the diver would have little trouble in fastening the grapple-end around me.

The first-aid kit was on board and opened. A glass of whisky was poured, for the air struck cold, and after the dip the stimulant might be needed to restore vitality.

Word was given me when all was ready and I climbed the cliff.

As I stood on its very edge, after finding a firm, safe footing, I glanced down just once at the spot I knew I was bound to hit. Then I turned my eyes away. That has always been my custom. I find that one sharp look just before the leap, after you have picked your place, makes for greater concentration than a long, steady stare at the spot.

The cameras started to grind. In a few seconds it would all be history—one way or another. Those interminable seconds just before the director drops his hand as a signal are always harrowing. I saw the rower lock his oars in the boat and get set. The diver was on the prow of the boat. The director's hand was raised high. That was my signal.

My eyes shot to the spot and I got into position. I must

jump out at least ten feet to clear the part of the cliff that bellied out. Yet I couldn't afford to overbalance.

The muscles of my legs tightened as I crouched for the leap. Then the legs straightened and I sprang. For just a moment I thought that I couldn't clear the ledge, and I moved my arms and head to change my course. It meant that I would have to turn a front flip or what we call a "full."

I was relieved when I saw the cliff pass by my head. Then I concentrated on making the dive. But I had neglected to take into consideration the deceptive wind which funnelled through the gap. As I struck it I was thrown off balance, and tried to make a "one and a half," which means a complete fall and a half landing on my feet. Dangerous with shallow water, but I was powerless to do better.

Now I was nearing the waves, and entirely out of position. It couldn't be helped, so suddenly I gave up trying for the classic one. Just one quick movement and I flopped on my back. It would be a heavy blow I'd get, but better than being dashed on the rocks below. I wondered quickly what would be the result. Well, I wouldn't have long to wait before I found out! . . . I hit. The spout of water that rose was huge as I disappeared under the surface. There I turned completely over, just grazing the rocks.

Quickly I came to the surface and swam to the boat. My back was stinging, but my face was smiling. I had just completed one of my shortest flights. All had happened in less than two and a half seconds, and I had another major stunt to my credit.

But the break of luck that I got on that stunt can't be counted upon by every stunt man.

Silvertip was working for Ruth Roland several years ago. He was possessed of splendid nerve but had no extraordinary amount of judgment. Not that he lacked judgment in an ordinary way, but the sense has to be overdeveloped and speeded up for successful stunting. It is my contention that the best men in our game are those who are high-strung, and Silvertip was not that.

One of the many stunts he did required him to jump from a fast train into a lagoon over which the railroad had built a trestle. The leap was not very high, but neither was the lagoon wide. Silvertip, therefore, had to time his departure with the nicest exactness. Should he leap too soon or too late he would land on the bank on one side or the other.

Before getting on the top of the train, he found that he had left his "double's" shoes at home, and in the pinch he borrowed a pair from Bob Rose. Bob was, and is, like that. He would give you his shirt and never ask to have it returned.

When they were ready to take the "thrill" the train was moved back far enough to accumulate the proper speed. Then it came on.

Silvertip could be seen approaching the side of the car on which he was to stand. He was in a crouched position ready to jump, with one hand holding the slight support afforded by the top of the car and the other raised in position for diving.

Within a few hundred feet of the bridge Bob Rose

remarked that the train was making plenty of speed and continuing to pick up momentum with each stroke of the engine pistons. Would Silvertip take this into consideration when he made his leap? Black smoke was pouring out of the stack, and flowing back over the cars: not enough to interfere with the jump; nevertheless it was disagreeable.

Now was Silvertip's moment. Still he did not move. Soon it would be too late and they would have to make a retake. The train rumbled on. At that speed, if Silvertip should go, he might be carried beyond the lagoon. Yet he was crouching and getting ready. Then he jumped. With his arms stretched forward, and his legs far apart, he—hit the bank! He had waited too long. The train's speed carried him beyond his mark, and there he lay, a broken, crumpled mass. He had made his last leap—dead. He too had joined the Squadron of Death.

Bob Rose took off the shoes, and he told me later that whenever he put them on after that there came over him a most peculiar sensation. Walking in the shoes of the dead, he never felt sure he wouldn't follow Silvertip all the way.

However, we are not a clan who can afford to dwell long upon the misfortunes of our comrades. As a matter of fact, we oblige ourselves to cultivate an element of the impersonal in our work. I suppose we realize that eventually ours will be the fate of those who have preceded us. The way of all stunt men: either death or insanity. Because they say that "Dead men tell no tales," before I join that Squadron of the Dead I'm going to put just a little bit of

our history on record. We don't amount to anything and I guess that the world won't be interested in an account of us, living or dead. But perhaps this squadron of mine, who come back to me in the dark middle of the night to stare with leering, smiling, or tear-stained faces, may wish to have their history told. At least no one who reads can say again in watching "movie stunts," "of course that's only a fake."

I don't know what the consequences of my work may be. And I don't care. Tales of these dead men do not die for me. They are retold in my brain nightly, and so I give them away to the world outside.

I was too young in the game at first to think as seriously as I do now. Then I was ambitious to "get somewhere." Where? God only knew. What a pitiful fool I was to hope that a man could climb the ladder of success on this work!

I began to see the grim reality of our game, though, when I went out to an aviation field where some of the new arrivals in flying put on their amateur exhibitions. A man was telling me one day how he could stunt at an unsafe altitude. I warned him that I thought he was foolish, but of course I was not well known on the coast in flying, and he laughed at me. I had a notion to go up and show him how the thing he meant to do ought to be done. Having no ship at the time, and as there was nothing at stake but my opinion, I left the amateur to prove that his own ideas were right—if he could.

Just as I was about to leave the field I heard a terrific crash and, turning, saw the dust pouring up from a bunch of wreckage. A few minutes before that tangled mass had been an airplane with a man in it.

X

CHANCES SUCCESSFUL AND UNSUCCESSFUL

The poor damned fool! He ought to have known better! There he was all crashed to hell—his head splattered to the size of a washtub—one arm grotesquely stuck through his right side and protruding on the left, just below the heart. His legs were still entangled in the jumbled mass of wire, linen, and wood that had been an airplane. Well, a few minutes before he was a stunt aviator. There he lay, now a shapeless mass of dirty mud. No semblance of features left, not a quiver of a muscle. I laughed grimly. I had told the poor fool that he couldn't do it, and I was right. Down below he must be beating the rusty hinges of hell, waiting, with his brevet of the devil, to join the rest of the unearthly clan. He had died in the cockpit, simply because he put too much confidence in the ability of a motor to pull him out of a low loop. But now he had new wings—black wings, like those of a vampire, only larger.

His name? It doesn't matter. After all, he was an amateur, and who the hell cares about one of them? He died like a chicken, without a squawk—and he had none coming!

How much it takes sometimes to kill a human being—

and others, how damned little! But it was not for me to philosophize. I had work to do, work of a kind which can't be interfered with by thoughts of those who go crashing into hell. A last look at the blanched faces of those who had gathered around, eager with morbid curiosity, and I left the field. Like a hill of ants were these humans, with their excited voices, their wish to gather in mobs and rush to the aid of those beyond help.

From the field to the William Fox Studios was some distance, and I arrived none too soon to prepare for the stunt for which I had contracted. It had nothing to do with aviation, since if you are a good stunt man you must know all the angles involved in the different phases of motion pictures. On a certain day you might be ordered to make a drop from one airplane to another. The next stunt called for might be a high dive, or the wrecking of an automobile, or any of the many and various forms of hazard which fill the lives of the haunted. This particular stunt of mine was somewhat unusual. A five-story front had been built on the isolated section of a street set at the rear of the lot. From the foreground it appeared very realistic, with the doors closed and the "backings" for the windows in place. But behind those windows I knew that cans of black powder had been poured. Huge piles of paper and old film, highly ignitible, were scattered about, and to make it even a warmer place the whole interior of the building had been soaked with gasoline. This was to be a fire scene, and knowing Bernard Durning, the director, I surmised that it would be as true to life as possible.

I went to my dressing room in Tin Pan Alley to put

on the so-called "double" clothes I wore for *The Fast Mail.* Strangely enough, this time I felt none of the usual exhilaration that had buoyed me up through all my former stunts.

Perhaps it was because of the boy's death in the ship; or was it that I was getting fed up with the game? Just one stunt after another and no chance of rising above it all! Before I came to the West Coast I had been a fairly well-known stunt man, had owned my own aviation field and given exhibitions. Before that there had been the war, which had taken me to France and Italy as an officer in the Naval Air Service. My life seemed destined to be one of sensation. How I wished now that I could be like the majority of my fraternity brothers at the university. They could come back and forget the war. By this time most of them were professional men. My father had begged and insisted, but I, like a fool, would stay with aviation! The result, I saw, would be that I'd stay with the damn game until it got me too. Just a lousy stunt man!

I rambled back to the set, a lively scene now. An old-fashioned fire engine was puffing and smoking at the far end of the street, and all about the place were firemen from the Hollywood station. Shirley Mason, Buck Jones, and a few of the other principals were grouped around the cameras. Extras were gathered in knots here and there, and with a little imagination it was easy to think this the real East Side of New York.

My appearance on the scene was a signal for activity. Cameras were moved to their final positions, extinguishers and the chemical hose cart were strategically placed.

Extras were warned to keep from the danger zone no matter what might happen.

"Are you ready?" asked Durning.

"Last instructions?" said I.

"None but these," he replied: "After the fire is lighted wait until I give you the signal. Then and only then jump into the fire net. There is nothing to fear. We have real firemen to handle the net, and plenty of equipment to put out the blaze."

"There's only one thing," I said. "Be sure to warn them to place the net clear of the wires." I nodded toward some telephone wires which were strung parallel to the windows of the third story, and at a distance of about ten feet from them.

"Don't worry. They know their business," said Durning.

As I climbed the stairs to the fire wall I noticed more gasoline and film being loaded into the fake backings, and knew that I was in for a hot time.

As I stood there I made a quick survey of the situation. Cement below, about a sixty-foot jump, and nothing to go to should——

"Light the fire," came from Durning.

There were a few seconds of intense silence as the men with torches approached the building.

A moment—then all was chaos. Everyone had expected a brief interim before the building should be swept with flames. But not so! There came a sort of puff, an explosion, and the entire building and myself were lost in flames. I stepped back to avoid the fire, but there is little protection on a three-foot fire wall. Great tongues of fire shot out into

the street and defied the helpless little engine. Through the flames I could see that it was impossible for the firemen to stand the heat. Twice they tried to get the net near enough for me to jump. The scene which had been so peaceful a few seconds before was now pandemonium. Women were crying; men were hysterical. The director most of all seemed to have lost his self-composure. Poor Durning, he always did that! I could hear him helplessly shouting: "For God's sake, get that net under there! Do something, you damn fools!"

The flames were scorching now. I noticed the heat raise a blister on one of my arms. I was a sap—a fool! Now it was my turn to join that squadron of the dead. Soon the devil would be handing me my new brevet, and I'd go crashing into hell. But not by burning. I'd jump to the pavement first.

A last effort of the firemen, and they got the net almost in place. *Almost!* Right under the wires. But it gave me a chance—my only chance. I knew that to stand there five seconds longer would be worse than taking the chance. I dived headfirst toward the pavement, and shivered as I saw it rise up at me. Then as I passed the wires at the third story I put my hands far out behind me. I felt the wire slide past the muscles of my arms, and partly closed my hands. A sudden jerk! I had caught there momentarily, flipping my body under the wires and into the net. A few seconds later the whole wall collapsed.

This finished "shooting" on that set for the day. Also it finished me for several more. The burns were superficial,

from the heat alone, but they were too painful for me to continue stunts, at least for a couple of days.

I had seen one thing on the set just before my stunt that interested me more than the stunt itself—a girl. She was only an extra, but I couldn't recall a woman with such an innocent and trustful face. Certainly, I thought, she should be a star. She had big blue eyes, blond hair, and was very slender. I'd been in pictures some time and never had I met even a famous star with so much natural appeal.

Harry Cornelli, the celebrated tumbler of Ringling Brothers Circus, who was also on the picture, told me that her name was Georgie Smith. I should certainly have liked to meet her. If I could have done so it would have paid me for the burns.

After Harry gave me the information I wanted we went over to the cashier's and I collected my hundred for the stunt I had done. That was one time when I earned all that I got, even if the Irishman, Kelly, in the casting office did think I was a highway robber. There was a casting director with a heart, but try to find it.

It seemed good to go around with a lot of bills in the pocket. It made me feel as if life was an enjoyable thing, after all.

We gathered up Pauly Malvern, another acrobat and stunt man, also Duke Green, Harvey Perry, Dick Dickinson, and Dick Curwood, all of whom belonged to our class. After a little dinner, during which they told me how lucky I was to be alive, we adjourned to Baldy's, a soft-drink parlour in front, with a place to play cards and get other drinks at the back. About one o'clock in the morning

I walked home, happy because I still had luck in my work.

Things were rather slow for a while after that stunt, which means that money was scarce, and I had to go back to the old diet of one meal a day. However, a small company was making two-reel comedies just then. Louise Fazenda and Chester Conklin were the stars, and I was asked to work for the outfit. The name of this concern was Warner Brothers. Nobody cared to work for comedy companies much in our game, because they expected you to jump off the Brooklyn Bridge for seven and a half. From what I'd seen of Jack Warner, though, I liked him and decided to go in for some of his stuff.

A few days with the Warners convinced me of one thing: these two brothers knew what they were about. They may have been financiers, or what have you, in New York, but here they were producers. Dick Dickinson and I ran a Ford off a cliff into the water for them, and all Jack Warner said when he saw the "rushes" in the projection room was, "Lousy!" I didn't know whether he meant Dick and me, or what; but I guess he knew that when you're told to do a dive in a certain spot, that's the only place to go.

After our day's work was over Dick and I came back to our hangout, the Fox Studio. While having a little dinner, Dick took exception to some remarks made by Chick Stall, a property man, and invited him outside. I've never seen so much blood in my life, and I've seen some! Dick is a contortionist, and Stall a husky wrestler. They rolled all over the sidewalk; but this contortionism is a great art. Try it! It seems that you can wrap arms and legs in different directions at the same time. While the poor wrestler

would be struggling for a hold, Dick would wind one leg around his neck and pound him on the head with the other. My travels have taught me to be a flier, wing-walker, high diver, race driver, and what not; but I'd certainly like to be a contortionist!

A few days after we did this minor stunt for Warner Brothers we all had a party at the home of Pauly Malvern. Among the guests was one named Burgess. His line of work was much the same as Locklear's and mine: climbing the wings of airplanes, jumping from one plane to the other, and the like. Burgess had agreed to hang by his arms from a wing skid of a plane, also to do other minor stunts for Slim Summerville, and he was telling me how he intended to accomplish his job. More or less casually, I looked over his heavy-set body and mentally noted the fact that he weighed about fifty pounds too much for quick, nimble walking on wings. However, I listened.

On the day set for the stunt I stopped to watch it. The thing was not difficult; I would not have considered it even a pastime. But Burgess got beyond his strength. After twice letting himself out at full arm's length he found it impossible to regain the slight bamboo support. He held on as long as he could, but not quite long enough. His strength gone, and muscles crystallized, there was but one thing to do. He jumped. But it was a pity that he had to fall on the high-tension wires. His body was a crisp, and I knew then how I would have looked if the firemen had not got that net under those wires when they did.

XI

AMONG OTHER THINGS—LOCKLEAR, A BROKEN FOOT, AND A GIRL

Omar Locklear was working for Fox, starring in a series of five-reel melodramas. Omar was the first person in the United States to change from one airplane to another, and he reaped the reward of his daring. It so happened that we had crossed paths several times in the Middle West when both of us were playing the fairs.

At that time, too, Ruth Law also was pushing her way in the little old Curtiss, accompanied by Barney Oldfield.

"Lock" and I had much to talk over when we came together in Hollywood, and we were glad to see each other again. Lock had with him his pilot, "Skeets" Elliot, who was as clever on the stick as they make them.

The pair were landing their ships behind the studio in an open space that borders Sunset Boulevard, but their regular field was Rogers Airport on Wilshire. Although the field was but a thousand feet long, "Shorty," the second pilot, and Skeets took off with Locklear on the wing. By the time they reached the end of the field Locklear was climbing the ladder on the landing carriage of Skeets's ship. That was the most sensational change I have ever witnessed.

Lock was very successful, but I thought now that something seemed wrong with the biggest dare-devil the air has ever known. He seemed very unhappy, and seldom smiled as he used to do in the old days. I was told, too, that even on parties in Hollywood, or at cafés, he would get morbid or cynical, and insist on going off at once to the aviation field. Skeets and Shorty would always accompany him there, and Locklear's chief stunt was to go up in one ship, coming down in another.

To make this change from plane to plane at any time of day is not the safest thing in the world; and at night—I just can't imagine doing it for fun. Locklear would seem relieved afterward, however, and would again be more or less the gay fellow we once knew.

While Locklear was starring I was doubling Louise Lovely for stunts, directed by George Hill, and as usual during this period was obliged to tackle more fire work. No particular danger was encountered, except that during the middle of one night's work the City of Venice was reported in flames. Instantly we dashed to the beach, and there were cameras set up to record the event. Hill had me racing through more burning buildings and streets than I ever knew existed. One in particular was warm! Just as I ran from the doorway the wall collapsed and killed two firemen.

By this time life was getting to be somewhat of a strain. Not that I worried as to what would become of me. I didn't give a damn. As I do now, I did then; I figured out my stunts long before doing them, and seldom missed. But we all miss sometimes. The great difference between the

lives of people in the outside world and this hell of ours is that when we make a mistake in a stunt our mistakes are irreparable. There are no erasers in our pencils. A mistake to us is a blot of blood. The dye is so permanent that the stain is everlasting. God is our only eraser—and He just rubs us off as part of His daily business.

However, there is one satisfaction. The pleasure is yours. We like to see people enjoy good pictures, and take great pride in furnishing thrills for the millions Out Beyond.

But *do* pictures furnish thrills? I usually go to see the films in which I or any of the clan have worked, just to learn how the public appreciates our stunting. When, for instance, a picture came out called *The Queen of Sheba*, starring Betty Blythe, I was eager to get the reaction of the people, not only to the film itself, but also to the stunts.

Words cannot describe my feelings when one lady reached over to another and said quite audibly, "They're certainly getting clever now! Wasn't that a beautiful fake?" The audience had just witnessed a net fall which broke the pelvic bone of a stunt man.

After this little experience I decided that those who made and patronized motion pictures had put us properly in our places. We were absolutely unimportant to the films. If we failed there was always the herd of amateurs left to kill off; those who came from all over the world, ready to risk anything just to get onto the screen. The stars and directors were right not to associate with us. After all, we were the most useless things in the whole game: ignorant, brainless, foolhardy.

One poor fellow I felt heartily sorry for about this time. He had been a stunt man for years, specializing in high dives. He couldn't have been more than forty years old, but he looked at least sixty. The only name we knew for him was Fritz, and even his friends called him by no other, though since early days he had been the ace of the Sennett lot. Earning good money, he saved part of it and bought for himself and his family a little home. He and his wife were close on middle age. They'd begun preparing for the time a few years hence when they could quit the game which gave a living but robbed them of all peace of mind.

Then Tragedy walked, and trod them down. Fritz did not miss the tank, but when he hit the cold water the shock to his nervous system was so great that he became completely paralyzed.

Even now, you may still see him slowly ambling down the street. The old smile is still there, and he has a cheery "How do?" for everyone on his way home to the little old wife. Thanks to the kindness of William Fox, who liked him and hated to see him go under, Fritz holds a comfortable if obscure and unimportant position as doorkeeper.

It may sound queer, but it doesn't take much to injure a man when diving from an altitude of a hundred feet or over. Long before Slim Summerville and Bobby Dunn were teamed by Fox to make two-reel comedies, Bobby was a high diver. His ladder rose well into the sky, and when on top of it the tank below looked about the size of a thimble. Being a professional, this stunt he had to do seemed nothing to him, but, despite many net dives and

the like that I've made, I am sure that I couldn't do that one. When a child I saw one of these divers miss—strike the edge. Perhaps that is one reason why I didn't envy Bobby his job.

Before each dive he would carefully test the tank and see that the water was clear. But one day after his inspection and while he was climbing the ladder someone lighted a cigarette, and carelessly threw the match into the tank. It was just a tiny match stick, but when Dunn hit the thing it might well have been a knife. It ripped one eye completely open, destroying the sight forever.

Yet the loss of a mere eye hasn't stopped Bobby from diving. Since that accident I saw him jump from the top of the Bryson Apartments, a building one hundred and twenty-five feet high, into a mortar box. Of course the box, which was about eight feet long and four wide, had a false bottom. The water was four feet deep.

When Bobby leaped from the top I was sure that it would be his last dive. He was not headed for the box at all, but while in the air he wriggled and twisted toward his goal, so that in spite of my presentiment he hit perfectly. Believe it or not, the boy didn't even get his back wet, so quick were his movements.

Others are not always so fortunate, however, as Bobby was. The accident to his eye was due to a bit of unthinking carelessness on the part of an outsider, and was not his fault at all. Bobby himself was one of the clever and therefore the lucky ones. Professional stunt men, in order to live any considerable length of time and not get maimed, must first and above everything else *know their stuff*. You

can't do high dives if you don't know how. I would not attempt anything sensational with a horse, since I know little or nothing about stunt riding. The next most important qualification for a stunt man, after learning his work, is nerve—or the lack of it. And last, though far from least of all, is youth. Old bones and bad judgment among stunt men fill the hospitals and morgues.

If I were a producer I would interview personally every stunt man I hired, and those unfit should not be allowed to perform. It would be a humanitarian act to refuse those who are bound to be injured.

Arthur Seitz was a good example of a man not fitted by nature for the job he wanted. He was ungraceful, and had not the carriage or quickness of action needed when managing the body in the air. He also lacked a sense of balance. True, he had done a number of chases in comedies, and had successfully made a few small leaps, but they were all minor affairs. When he had engaged to do a stunt he worried, despite our efforts to cheer him up. The poor fellow was getting along in life, well toward the mesozoic stage, in which a man instinctively becomes cautious and inclined to settle down.

Regardless of these conditions, which he knew as well as we did, he took a contract to jump from a second-story window into a huge dry-goods box. This box could not have been more than six feet square and four deep. Yet a second-story window is a long way up if you hit wrong.

I watched poor Seitz as he stood on the sill, nervous and impatient, as a man of his age was likely to be in such a situation. I thought of the time when I had done a six-

story dive into a fire net with a cigarette in my mouth. Bernard Durning never quite got over the fact that I was still smoking it as I walked from the canvas. But I was young enough to be Seitz's son.

This particular jump was one of those which we all discounted; but at that we were there as usual to see how others executed their stuff.

As soon as the word was given to jump, it almost seemed as though he must have shut his eyes, so inaccurately had he picked the spot to land. He didn't hit the box, and he didn't miss it, but finished astraddle of the sharp one-inch boards. What a terrible accident from a minor stunt! It split him apart, up to his entrails. Hideously hurt, he half sat and half reclined where he had fallen, and unfortunately was fully conscious. Someone would have done the man a real favor in shooting him. I know this because, though I've never met with that kind of an accident, in some of mine the pain must have approached his.

The poor fellow's groans were inhuman. They sounded like the yells of some wild animal caught in a forest fire, about to be consumed. I'll never forget years ago hearing the screams of about twenty horses which were burning to death in a stable. Their cries of agony were human and this man's were animal-like.

And yet he lived! He'll always be a cripple, and they say that his sewerage system is transparent now, that he has to wear a lot of glass tubing; an existence which does not appeal to me. I hope if I ever get it, I'll get it so completely that they'll only have to shovel dirt over the spot and rope it off until the sun shines. However, I have found

that most people are like Seitz. They may say they'd rather die than be hurt beyond mending; but when it comes to the great big show-down the majority wish to live under any circumstances and hate to die. It is only the men in our game, or other games of the same sort, who sincerely prefer death to life as physical wrecks.

At the time of Seitz's accident I was working in stock at the Fox Studios with the old Al St. John Company. Al was (and is) a natural-born equilibrist. The way he could run a bicycle was nobody's business! Backward, forward, on his head!

I took him up in a ship one day and gave him the controls. Within five minutes he was piloting like an old hand. He told me that he had been with the game more or less since I started, and that he had made parachute jumps from kite balloons when he was afraid to stay with them and afraid to jump.

After about forty-five minutes he was ready for landings, and just about that time he decided that he would like to walk wings. I had nothing to say about it. We were in the air. I was at the controls. What can you do when your student suddenly decides that the seat is too small?

That started Al to walking wings, and I guess that in the few weeks before the company found it out and persuaded him to stop he walked as much atmosphere as anyone had ever walked. His favorite pastime was to fly over Beverley Hills, seek out Fatty Arbuckle's house, and carry on a conversation, comedian to comedian. This suddenly ended after a flight of prolonged duration during which we were forced to scrape the palm trees bordering the

streets. Upon landing we were escorted back to the little city by a squadron of motorcycle police.

After we got out on bail we all adjourned to St. John's home, where we held a stag party, three men and four women—the fourth woman being the stag. Al was a very generous host, and like all stars was incrusted with the usual motion-picture barnacles. I think that by the time dinner was served the party included some twenty-two guests. The stag party was ruined.

Days passed like minutes, and we stunt men used to find ourselves in a job, then out of one. But my contract with St. John lasted longer than most. When it ended I took on an engagement to double for the handsome hero of a Fazenda picture, and for this session we all adjourned to the waterfront at San Pedro.

I, doubling for the hero, was to jump onto the rail of a speed boat as it passed the dock. This thing sounded easy, but already I had learned that there are two reasons why directors and production managers make a stunt sound so "easy." The first is that it's really hard and they think you sap enough to take their word. The second, and paramount, reason is that they intend to give you as little for the job as possible. It behooves the wise stunt man, therefore, to boost his price up to twice the sum he expects to get, then cut to his own satisfaction and that of the main office.

This special stunt I speak of, however, really should have been easy. The wharf was about fifteen feet above sea level during the time of tide when we intended to work.

The speed boat was to pass within ten feet of the piles, and I was to jump at the director's command.

It was the boat's rate of speed that made the thing impossible, for going as it did, instead of coming within ten feet it couldn't pass nearer the dock than twenty-two feet. This made quite a difference in our calculations!

I could not jump that distance, but I could make a running dive for the rail. To do this required perfect timing, otherwise I would miss and be thrown into the water, dangerously near the propeller.

Twice I let the boat pass, making false starts to test my judgment. Then I gave my director the signal and the camera started to grind.

I did make a faultless leap. The distance wasn't too much; but had it been just six inches more I should have missed. As it was, I hit with such force against the anchor on the side of the boat that I broke all the bones in my left foot. And that wasn't all! The camera man ran out of film and failed to get the shot, which meant a retake. With my foot still numb and almost useless, I had to do the stunt over again. The bang that old foot got on the second successful jump didn't make me feel exactly like going to a dance, and the worst of it was that it would do no good to have the broken bones set that night. I was scheduled to make a fifty-foot dive from a bridge in Hollenbeck Park the next morning. That dive was nothing much—nothing much more than misery, with my foot swollen until only a giant's shoe could have been pulled on. I lost no time after the stunt was over in going to Drs. Dickey and Cass for medical treatment.

That turned out to be the luckiest visit I ever made to their emergency hospital. They set the bones, splintered the foot, and gave me two crutches to use. I hobbled away very unhappily. Now, I said to myself, I'd be out of the game (according to the doctors) for at least four weeks. A discount for good behavior and for my physical fitness might cut that in half, but I'd hardly be strong enough for any good stunts, although I might try to play around with them. Thus my thoughts as I crutched down the street, my head bent over to accommodate the pads under my shoulders. And then——

"Oh! you're hurt!" exclaimed the voice of a girl.

"Gout," I corrected before looking up.

"I'm—I'm so sorry!" went on the voice. "I often remember that brilliant fire dive I saw you do. May I help you to your car—or—may I drive it for you?"

Before me stood the girl with the innocent face—Georgie Smith, the girl I had wanted to meet!

"Why, I'd be delighted. It would be rather hard for me to manage alone," I said, trying to hide my happiness, and to put on a weary, hospital-patient air.

The girl drove me home, and on the way we talked of motion pictures, of her folks and mine, of the climate, growth of the city, real estate, her home town, mine, the traffic, light wines and beers. Finally the weather. Finally —nothing. We had been parked outside my place for an hour when we discovered that she had no way to get home—so I drove her home. Before I left her I had an engagement for the next evening.

It was now dark, and as I had had no dinner I decided to

go to the café on the Fox lot, our old hangout. The place was almost deserted and looked gloomy, but on the strength of that very fortunate meeting with Georgie Smith I had a good appetite, and ordered a T-bone rare with the usual hash-brown.

The Fates decree peculiar things, I mused, awaiting my order. Rather wonderful that just as I crutched out of the hospital She should happen along! An impossible coincidence it would have seemed, but there's no such word as "impossible" to Destiny. Those same old Fates hadn't been so mean to me after all! For years the Long Black Finger had pointed away from me when the Big Law called out for another stunt man.

I had had only two loves in my life: a very small and innocent affair before the war, then my ten days' leave spent with little Thérèse in Paris. Now it looked as if the Fates meant to give me a real Romance.

While I was thus ruminating a camera man on Locklear's picture came in and sat down near me. Between mouthfuls of the food just brought I told him of my slight accident, though nothing about Miss Smith.

Neither of us noticed Locklear enter, but when we did catch sight of him it was simultaneously, and the camera man shook his head.

"Lock's been acting queer lately," he mumbled to me.

"Working too hard," I said. "Too much of it. It's funny he didn't speak to us. We're here all alone . . ."

Locklear was leaning against the marble counter, staring fixedly into the mirror behind it. A chocolate soda stood

untouched before him. Then suddenly he seemed to recognize our presence. Turning round he asked:

"Coming to the field to-night?"

"Why no, I'm not," answered the camera man. "I have to work on some double exposures for the picture here at the studio."

"Better come out," said Locklear.

"But Lock, I'll catch hell if I don't get my work done. Anything exceptional out at the field?"

"Well," mused the king of stunt men, "if you don't come out you may miss the best shot in the picture." Without another word or look at us he walked to the door. We noticed that he'd left his soda untouched.

Some hours later I was still thinking over that short conversation. It was peculiar. Locklear's words sounded as if he had a presentiment. I'd heard others talk that way. I wondered what he might have meant, then tried to forget the whole incident. But it stuck in my head. Finally in disgust I threw down the book I was reading and put on my overclothes.

From my house to the field was approximately six miles and I had been ordered by the doctors to keep quiet. So I started out slowly. Yet the more I thought the faster I travelled. Soon I had only half a mile more to go. The drone of a motor could be heard clearly in the sky. Huge sunlight arcs were playing about the silhouetted figure of Locklear, five thousand feet above them.

Suddenly, as I looked, the wings of the ship gave forth a flame. There were phosphorous flares to make it appear as if the ship were burning. It was a clever stunt, and up

to that time not often done. I got out of my car and watched. Locklear went into the prettiest spin I have ever witnessed, with those tongues of flame streaming far back and into the heavens. One, two, three thousand feet he fell. He was now but a bare thousand up.

"Bring it out!" I said to myself as if I spoke to Locklear. But the spin kept on. "Bring it out—bring it out! For God's sake, Lock, quick! BRING IT OUT!!"

But he went on falling. Now it was almost too late to save himself. I started to run—my hands were wet with sweat. "Out—quick!" I stumbled and fell flat on my face. At the same time I heard the ungodly crash that only those who have witnessed a tailspin into the ground can understand.

When I got to my feet again the sky was covered with a red illumination. For miles around one could see. The ship had fallen into the pool of an oil well. It was all on fire. Locklear and his pilot Skeets had joined another squadron.

I got drunk that night.

XII

"BURRP!" THE HERO SAID

DREAMS! Nightmares! Locklear! Fire! Unbelievable pain! Horrible faces! Locklear! What I went through that night was a menace to sanity. I drifted into sleep only to hear and see that friend of mine being shot suddenly into hell. How much more vivid this death of dreams than death in actuality!

Again and again I heard that crash into the ground. I saw the terrific impact, the fire. Then I seemed to suffocate once more in that thick silence following the crash, when I had stumbled in the road. But now in dreams the flames were larger, fiercer. They were so close to me that my face felt burning, blistering. And in the centre of that crazy setting Locklear's features would rise and form in the flickering shadows of the flame. Ghastly and terror-stricken, he would cry to heaven through the darkness. Slowly, mechanically, his mouth would close, then open. The air would be rent with a harsh, agonized scream. Long drawn out, it would be terrifying, and I would answer. The vibrations of my voice as it rose to reach him seemed to shake the stars in their orbits.

At last I would start awake at sound of my own shouts

to Locklear: "Bring it out! For God's sake, bring it out!"

The nightmare dreams broke only to form again, and perhaps my sanity was saved by the pictures that came into my mind as I wakened.

The black square of ceiling in my room at Hollywood was a screen upon which the years of my childhood in the prairie home near the Canadian border passed like a film. A strange psychological puzzle, that the peaceful days of my early youth should alternate with the horrors of nightmare! But for the moments they were with me they calmed my brain.

One scene was as clear as it had been in reality, long ago: the northern lights kindled in the extreme cold of winter reaching up from dark depths of their circle in the North, spreading over the sky, and shooting their varied colors far into the south. To me as a child this had been an exhibition given by the Great Unknown Power, and I felt that Power behind it now, as I had felt it when I would slip out of my second-story window into the snow to stare over the black waste of whiteness while everyone else slept; to hear the wolves, the prairie foxes, the coyotes.

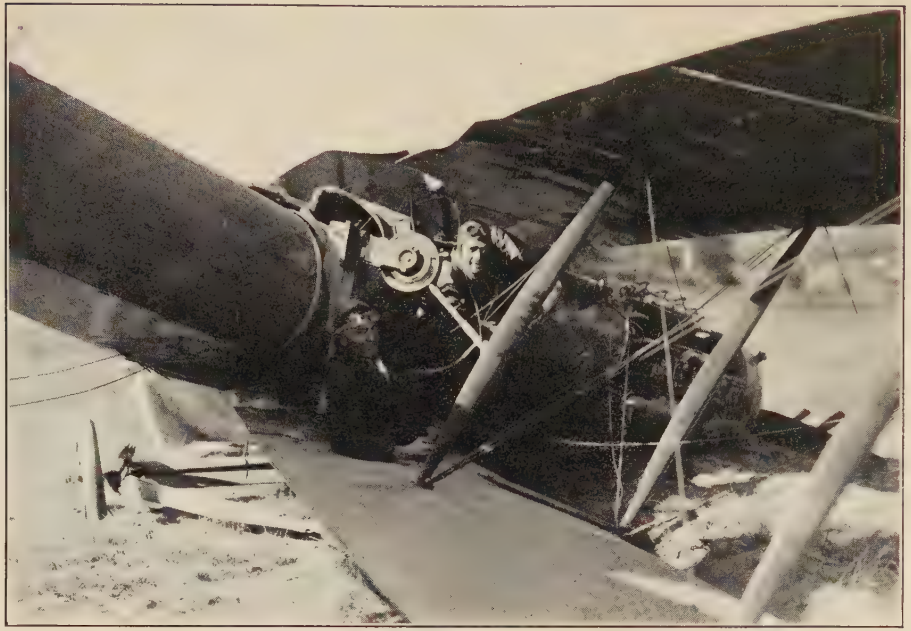
Here in bed in Hollywood I lay and wondered why the fire that burned Locklear's ship lighted in my brain those northern fires of long ago. I feared I was going the way of all stunt men; for all who fail to be killed half expect to go insane. Never had any death affected me in such a way, not even that of Sylvester, the first friend I had seen die. But when the morning light of southern California chased away the little buzzards of the devil that had been picking at my brain, I felt more or less normal once more. I record

the sufferings of that night only to show those outside why stunt men have to learn, in self-defense, to be hard-boiled.

I decided, when I'd had a cold shower and gulped down a little breakfast, that, broken foot and all, the best medicine for me would be a new stunt. I was going to call up Billy Wellman, Durning's assistant, when my 'phone sounded. I had secured my stunt all right!

I agreed to do as I was asked. By way of preparation I removed the splints from my foot and bound the broken bones so tightly with adhesive tape that circulation was practically stopped. It was only so that I could get into a shoe; but when I had pulled the shoe on I was surprised to see how little I limped. The one real trouble was that with every step I took I could feel the bones grind against each other. Of course I was doing an unwise thing from a physical point of view, but from a mental view perhaps I was right.

My knowledge of broken bones—which was plenty—told me that cartilage doesn't begin to form for about ten days after a break; so it would be necessary after this coming stunt to have my foot reset. Luckily I had, and still have, a doctor friend always ready to be called upon in such emergencies, independent of those furnished by the studio. Clarence M. Movius is his name. We had roomed together at the fraternity house when both of us were students at the University of Minnesota. Thinking of him, I felt confident that I shouldn't have to lose my job because of my foot, though I was being a bit imprudent. Anyhow, I went to the studio, reported, and the nature



Having some fun and doing Tom Mix *a slight favour on the side.*

of the stunt involved was explained to me. An imitation of a submarine had been built on the location of the studio tank set, and was to all appearances very realistic.

Good thing it was water stuff, I thought. It's easier to swim and dive with a broken foot than to walk.

The entire submarine had been waterproofed so that the electricians might place lights within the hull of the fake. A bell, which in this case was another waterproof container, was set about thirty feet from the torpedo tube. Within this the camera men and their equipment were to shoot the stunt.

What I was expected to do seemed simple. I had only to lie flat on my stomach within the torpedo tube, arms outstretched, while air was forced into the tube. When the container had a sufficient amount per square inch pressure to shoot me out into the tank some twenty feet, an automatic release would be touched, and the stunt would be on.

For this the only precaution I needed to take would be to have stoppers for the nose and ears. The director gave me these, the tank was hastily filled, and the troupe assembled.

Looking back now I can see no reason why a "dummy" instead of a "double" could not have been used with the same success. But on further analysis I can still get the producer's point of view. It would cost just as much to make the dummy as it would to hire the double, and in all other respects the two things are one and the same.

The tank was filled. I climbed into the conning tower,

which had been built extra high so that it might remain out of the water. Final instructions were given to me for no reason at all, and I crawled into the tube.

From then on I was the dummy. I had nothing to do but to wait. After they closed the trap behind me I was in utter darkness, in more ways than one. Dimly I could hear voices outside the tube, giving orders or frantically passing them on.

Then came the first burst of air. It was as if somebody had hit me hard blows all over at the same instant. I was glad that I had found exceptionally good ear stops and that I'd closed my nose with a strong pin, something in the nature of a double-spring clothespin. At the last moment I had also placed a pressure arrangement over my mouth, just in case I might not be able to keep the air from forcing my lips inward, thus allowing air to enter and burst my lungs.

Phew! came another burst of air! I felt as though some strange magician were squashing me down to half size. I knew then what the inside of a lemon experiences in a squeezer!

About this time it became imperative for me to breathe. I ventured to release the tension of my jaws. *Burrp!* No sooner had I the thought than the air thought too. It forced itself down into my lungs. Again I increased the tension, even as the agony of holding my breath increased. The seconds were seeming long, a bad sign in such a case. Before they would pass into the past, as I counted them mentally, they seemed to stay in the present, dancing

up and down in front of my eyes, doing a couple of flops, then fading slowly away in a sneak.

Burrp! Thinking too much, I had taken on more air. Why the hell didn't those goofs release me?

But on the deck a little comedy was being enacted.

THE DIRECTOR (scratching his head): "Something seems wrong."

The assistant looks up at him from his low camp chair and yawns. He stretches his arms, then places his chin thoughtfully in a cupped hand.

THE DIRECTOR (with certain conviction): "Something must be wrong!"

ASSISTANT (head nodding involuntarily as the heat of the sun overcomes his loss of sleep): "P'raps you're right."

The director's face suddenly beams with great brilliance. It beams with all the wisdom of Cæsar and the power of Napoleon. He rises slowly from the chair, and stands majestically, a sight for smaller men to behold. His every movement is being watched by an awed and terror-stricken troupe. He crashes his hand cruelly against his chest, his face revealing the intensity of his emotions.

"There *is* something wrong!"

Now back to the slave in the torpedo tube, who *burrps* incoherently, "Sixes and eights."

DIRECTOR: "There's a man in the tube!"

ASSISTANT, correctingly: "No sir—a double."

DOUBLE: "*Burrp!*"

The director, the assistant, and the double beg for assistance.

A little man approaches, his cowardly pose a strange

contrast to the dignity of the director. He is the property man.

"Sir, the pressure has jammed both openings. But with a blowtorch we can soon burn a hole in the tube and release the pressure."

Frantically they all rush for blowtorches and assemble at the end of the tube as the only torch on the lot is rushed to the set. A loud hiss of air escapes the tank. Then the hinges are cut and the double removed. He is helped to his feet, and staggers drunkenly. Then he removes the mouthpiece. He looks them all over dazedly and sags to his knees. Registering deep disdain, he turns to the director as if about to speak. Everybody is silent. The moment is filled with drama. Breathlessly they wait for a statement from the double. It comes.

"*Burrp!*"

"Fire him!" from the director. "Nobody can give me the razzberry."

XIII

BEASTS OF THE CIRCUS AND STUNTING SKY HIGH

I did not see Georgie Smith that night nor for many nights after. I learned in a roundabout way that the director of a picture for which I had done some stunts was making it difficult for me to get Miss Smith at home. Her line was always busy or she was "out." But at that time I didn't care much. I was so busy that I couldn't even find a few minutes to write home letters. In spite of my broken foot I was managing to do a few stunts. However, I didn't indulge in anything where fast foot action or balance was required until I was practically well again.

Then I was called for a stunt new to me. The picture was entitled *The Eleventh Hour*—a mystery melodrama. Bernard Durning was directing, so naturally after my work for him in *The Fast Mail* I was asked to join the troupe.

The first stunt wanted had to do with lions. Several times previously I had scraped acquaintance with these animals, but this stunt with them seemed rather difficult to me. A circular cage about fifteen feet in diameter and the same in height had been built of iron bars. The top

was roofed with two-inch boards. In the centre of this roof was a trapdoor, which could be sprung at will.

The story reads that a band of criminals captures the hero; but he, being a movie hero, escapes some fifty of the gang, and they chase him through the chief villain's House of Torture. Being pressed by his pursuers in the picture (and by his creditors out of pictures), he takes to the top of the lions' den. Whereupon the head villain smiles maliciously, presses any old button that happens to be strung around, and the poor hero is tumbled onto the lions through the trapdoor.

Before I got up on the trap I asked Charlie Gay and his fifteen lines if they were all tame. Charlie said Yes. Now Charlie has the only lion farm in America. In it he breeds, raises, and trains lions. I should say that he has two hundred at least in his "jungle" at El Monte.

He did qualify his statements, I must admit, by saying that he wasn't sure what these Kings of the Beasts would do in a motion-picture studio, when they saw something being thrown to them from above. Hearing this, I suggested that we try out another dummy before I went in. This he agreed to do, so I opened the trap and threw in the likeness of a man.

Well, you should have seen those lions go for that bunch of straw and plaster! Before it hit the floor about five out of the fifteen had it. And I had to remember that it was straw, and I meat. Once lions get the smell of hot blood they realize quite quickly that it's different from their usual diet of horse flesh.

Naturally I became a little dubious.

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But I got on the roof again, and set myself ready for the spring of the trap. When they opened the door, however, and I started to fall, I knew that I hadn't used any too good judgment. Some of the lions started too. Others crouched into corners, waiting until they could more accurately gauge their leap. I thought they were the wise ones, so when I hit I made a jump for the bars, and with two leaps was up at the trap once more. Even before I got through it, one lion had torn my shirt and ripped a finger, but luckily I had four others to wiggle! I like lions —they're so nice and gentle.

Bengal tigers and leopards, though, are not favorites with me. I had to double Grace Darmond, Philo McCullough, and Jack Richardson on a serial which Warners were making, and had a running acquaintance with most of the animals of the Al G. Barnes Circus, which we used for the picture.

The woman in charge of the leopards kept assuring me that "leopards are as tame as cats when you know them"; so when her pets were in their cages that night I thought I'd get friendly. I didn't like to have them crouch in the back of their cages every time I passed and take a running jump at me. That made me nervous. So I got a hunk of meat and ventured close enough to shove it under the food board at the bottom of the iron bars. But the nearest leopard never looked at the meat. He just reached out one paw, grabbed me between the belt and the collar button and drew me right up to the cage. At that, he'd hooked me only with one claw, but we compromised. I gave him my coat and vest.

The next day, when the sweet pets were all turned loose on the stage (on one of which a jungle set was built) a husky leopard sprang from a tree when the trainer's back was turned and helped himself to her ear. Kind, gentle little pussy cats!

The trainer of the alligators put on the same act for me, vowing that his tropical charmers were tame and toothless. Whenever I got near to them, however, they didn't exactly blink their eyes with glee. They hissed "plenty," showing their interiors as far down as their tails, also a set of fangs to be proud of. I was further impressed by the trainer's statement when I noticed that he had only half a hand.

All of which contradictory knowledge made me happy because I had to wrestle with the leading reptilian, and finally drop into the jungle pool or watering hole.

The trainer showed me how to grasp an alligator properly. Approach it from behind slowly, then grab it and wrap your legs around its belly. After this, slide your hands quickly along the reptile's head to the end of the long snout, grasping the jaws. Then you have so much leverage that it is impossible for the brute to open its mouth. This proved to be not nearly so difficult as it sounded.

One other thing, too, I learned about alligators at this time. When you tickle them on their stomachs it hypnotizes them. For which reason I'm glad that I'm human!

All the animals on this particular picture were under the control of Curly Stecker. He had been trainer for a long time at Universal, so was well qualified for the job. He could make most of those beasts do anything he wished.

But one of them was a natural enemy: a chimpanzee. It had the nasty habit (every time Curly turned his back) of hitting him with one of its long paws as hard as it could. Curly stood this as long as he thought wise, and then of course he punished the offender.

That did not improve matters, however. Instead of walloping the trainer the chimpanzee took to biting him, and Curly in a rage fetched a pair of pliers and pulled its teeth out.

Curly had one other enemy among his charges. This was Charlie, the gigantic pachyderm at Universal. It seems that Charlie had once gone on a rampage out at the "U," and Curly had taken a shot at him. A bullet hit the big old elephant on the forehead and of course did nothing to him except to make him mad. But—elephants never forget.

Four or five years later Charlie was working for First National. Curly was also engaged on the lot but with a different company. Charlie caught sight of him from a distance, however, as Curly was passing the set and started for him. I don't think Curly knew, until the elephant was within a few feet of him, that he was the quarry wanted. When he did realize what was up it was too late. Charlie wrapped his powerful trunk around his ex-trainer's waist and threw him to the ground. But this was only the beginning. Next, the elephant plumped down on his huge knees and started to knead Stecker into the ground. The only thing that saved the trainer from instant death was the fact that he had been thrown so close to a huge stone that it was impossible for Charlie to get at all of him.

Instantly the elephant's own trainer ran to the spot

and beat the beast on the bottom of one of its hind feet, which made it cry like a baby. Which is a good trick to remember if an elephant ever gets you down.

Curly's ribs were pretty well smashed before he was released, however, and he had some bad internal injuries, from which he later died.

As time went on Charlie grew too mean and killed rather too many people; so they decided to get rid of him. They could find but one safe way to do this, and that was to hang the huge beast from a big steam derrick.

For my last stunt with the Al G. Barnes Circus, Philo McCullough and I had to be in a canoe out in the middle of the tropical pool. Then they turned the hippopotamus in. It was supposed to enter the water and play around, at last coming fairly close to us. When it opened its wide mouth, that was to be our cue. We would then head for the shore.

A hippo is wise. Even with its short legs it can run as fast as a horse. Not that this one did so. It ambled slowly along, sweating its usual amount of blood. Then it entered the water and sank. We knew that sometimes these living submarines stay under for hours, so Philo and I just sat there and waited. But not for long! All of a sudden we felt the boat rise under us. We were tossed into the air, and when we landed we were swimming. It was a close race, but we won. And if you think we can't climb fences ask Philo.

When the hippo had hunted us from his domain nobody could get him out. Ruth, the elephant, was pressed into service, but the hippo knew what he wanted and chased Ruth away squealing. If you ever saw a mad animal it was

when they drained the whole pool off that hippopotamus!

Directly from the Warner Brothers serial I returned to Fox, to do a stunt for Tom Mix, and this time I was back in my former profession, that of acrobatics in the air. The picture for which they wished the stunt was called *Sky High*, directed by Lynn Reynolds. It was up to me to leave the cockpit of the ship and slide down a twenty-foot knotted rope.

Of course this does not sound difficult, and to many people probably wouldn't be so. But I knew rope ladders well. I knew that the ordinary ladder is hard enough to work on unless you have every little detail of the business in your head. For instance, it is much easier to climb a ladder facing opposite the direction in which you are going. This can be understood when you consider that with the speed you make you are blown against the ladder. Whereas if you work from the other side you are being blown away from it. Another secret of rope-ladder work is to find time and positions for repose. If your arms get tired it is a simple matter to rest, hanging by your knees.

But just a plain knotted rope gives you none of these advantages. At all times both the arms and the legs are under a severe strain. If you don't believe this climb up and down a twenty-foot rope and then add to your other troubles the fact that you must combat an eighty-mile wind force. Also that there's the fuselage to climb up or get down to!

For these reasons I didn't consider this stunt particularly easy. Furthermore, it was Friday the thirteenth when this was due to take place, and on our way to the

field in the studio car a black cat crossed our path. That such a combination of omens should present themselves at once was startling, even if I were not superstitious. So imagine my mental state when on changing a five-dollar bill on the field I got two two-dollar bills in return. After this, just to make all things right, I lit the third cigarette on a match and then went up to do the stunt.

"Bud" Creeth was the pilot, and one of the very finest. He had been in pursuit ships during the war, had been decorated, and had never left the game since. He was known as a steady, conservative flier. I had been acquainted with him for some time, and on other jobs (similar but not so difficult) I had always asked for him as pilot.

When we were about five hundred feet from the ground I got Creeth's nod. This was the signal that he was ready for me to get out, that we were now in position for the cameras on the ground. I left the seat and climbed over the side. The "wash" from the propeller was strong, equal to a gale of cyclonic velocity.

Slowly I made my way to the end of the rope, where I was whipped and whirled in all directions by the wind. Every time Bud banked the rope would swing, and I noticed another detail which I'd failed to take into consideration: that banking when on a rope is different from banking when on a rope ladder. There you don't feel the reaction to centrifugal force as much, because the rungs of the ladder give you some stability.

At last we got the O. K. signal from the ground and I climbed back. But it wasn't easy climbing against wind and height on such an unstable thing as a rope.

We landed, reloaded the cameras, and immediately took off again. This time another ship had the cameras on it, to catch the same shot from the air.

Once more I repeated my performance. I believe no one realizes what it is to do those things one after the other. That shot was not to the satisfaction of the camera man and so, rather worn and tired, I finally accepted the signal to repeat the stunt. Each time I slipped farther down the rope I felt that I was making a graver mistake. But eventually I reached the bottom, where according to programme I went through the motions of waving to someone on the ground. Each time I waved it, the arm acted like a weather vane, and whirled me like a top! But this was no place to get dizzy. Vertigo would be as fatal here as it would be while flying through fog in the night.

The view one obtains from beneath a ship is a peculiar one at any time, with only the belly and bottom of the wings to look up to, and certain death to look down upon. We were up to five thousand feet. The little patchwork quilt that represented fields and cities beneath was beautiful, but not particularly pleasant for me to contemplate. I was not tied nor wired, had no rung on which to place a foot and give my arms a chance to regain fast-ebbing strength. Still no signal came from the camera man. Soon —soon I should have to do my best to climb back.

Again I looked down. We were flying over mountains; Mount Lowe with its observatory was almost directly below us. A fine sight ordinarily, but I was in no mood to admire them.

Apparently the camera man had forgotten that he was

to give me a signal, or how could he expect any man to have such endurance? This was my third trip up and down that ladder and I'd been performing this last time for at least twelve minutes. Just try to climb up and down a rope inside a gymnasium for such a length of time, and see what it feels like.

I had almost gone the limit of my strength, so regardless of camera man, picture, or orders, I started to climb back to the cockpit.

It was slow work! I labored. Each time I took a new grip and pulled myself up it became more evident that I would have to fight hard for my life.

I glanced over to the camera ship to see if the man there was still grinding. He was! But he now seemed to realize that I was in trouble and intended to record the whole incident if I should fail. I smiled—grimly. Well, why shouldn't he? It was all in his day's work!

I got to the bottom of the fuselage and there the full effect of the wind blast struck me. I hadn't an even chance to make it, being so tired. My muscles ached intolerably; were becoming numb. My shoulders seemed about to break. I was now just crawling inch by inch through that propeller stream. The rope was close to the fuselage, making it difficult to obtain new holdings; but after a struggle I got my hands on the edge of the cockpit—the seat I had left those few minutes before—minutes which seemed so long. It was then that the final disappointment came. The holster at my waist caught in the linen on the under side of the fuselage. Every time I tried to lift my body toward

the seat it stopped me. I looked up at the leather-covered side of the pit, so near yet so hopelessly far away!

Then I looked down. The distant earth was inviting—restful. To one suffering as I was the fall with death at the end held no such terror as I had dreamed. Thus had Burgess died, and I believed that it was with no regret or fear. He must have felt much as I did at that moment: longing to be relieved at any cost from the anguish of utter exhaustion. As runners in marathons fall and lie weakly on the ground, so Burgess must have given up. Too tired and weak to care, I let myself out to my armpits. So, held on with the fingers of one hand, I would make just one last desperate effort. With the free hand I unbuckled the holster and it flew away in the wind. Then both hands mechanically sought the cockpit.

But Creeth saw—and understood. Desperately he tried to control and to help at the same time, but he had to keep a level keel, as one little bump would knock me loose. I shook my head in negation.

Bud was more than six feet tall, and well built. From out of nowhere he appeared over the seat. I knew then that he must be controlling partially with his knees. We were climbing almost to a stalling point, as with one hand Bud pulled me up far enough to get my foot in the foothold at the bottom of the fuselage. Then I was able to make the pit, where I sat weakly for a few moments. I was without a thought, and if Bud thought anything he never said anything to anybody about it as long as we knew each other.

XIV

SOMETIMES THEY MISS

Shortly after this adventure I bought two airplanes of my own; and Tom Mix gave me a T. M. Scout for a Christmas present. From that time on I was equipped to perform all manner of stunts, including my changes from plane to plane, wing-walking, parachute-jumping, and the rest.

I didn't confine my work to any particular line. I still engaged for high dives and went in for any hazard that was well paid and interesting; but my being definitely in aviation again and an owner of ships gave me more prestige. This was owing to the fact that aviation is a field of its own, apart from motion pictures. Film producers merely borrow aviation for the glorification of their pictures.

It was through my possession of these ships that the well-known Dick Curwood and I became great friends. We had met in the studio and had been on several pictures together. I could take him up and let him crawl, walk, and run on the wings of my plane. His life had been so varied and exciting that he could tell good yarns. I grew to like him immensely.

Till I met Dick I'd had an impression that my own past wasn't exactly a blank page, but when I listened to tales of Curwood's wild adventures I felt an infant. He had

known tragedy. Dick had married a girl he loved, when he was very young. Then his wife had died, leaving him with two babies to support and bring up. That was enough to wipe the old smile off his face, especially as he hadn't a cent saved. He worried a bit, and maybe worry helped him to have appendicitis. Anyhow he had it all right, and an operation to follow. The children were with his mother and sister, yet he had their keep and education on his mind, so he decided to search for gold in Alaska.

How to get there was the question!

He was still weak, just out of the hospital, when he started to work his way to the Klondike. Only a man with the bulldog determination shown by Dick's set, square jaws could have endured the hardships he went through. He engaged himself as a cook, a waiter, a bell hop; but those were the easy jobs. Nothing was too disagreeable, too difficult, if it helped him heap up a few more dollars toward buying his outfit for the Far North.

Well, he got his equipment together, and started off for the desolate wastes where the chances of striking a vein of gold were said to be best. He had a partner with him, but the partner died when both were beyond the zone of civilization. Curwood had to battle on alone, struggling toward his goal; and the hero of a movie bravely enduring his hardships would have been rewarded by a fortune. Being only a "true to life" hero, his efforts were crowned with failure, or partial failure. Instead of the cool million he'd set out to make, when at last he gave up and cashed in the gold he had panned and dug, his fortune amounted to no more than four thousand dollars.

Still, he had the same old ambition: to educate his children, to send them to college, so something new had to be planned. Dick dragged his way back into the United States, and gambled all his savings on the purchase of a free balloon. With this he intended to give exhibitions, only to face disappointment again. The work was tedious and paid little; so when a big movie corporation hired him for a balloon picture the poor fellow was happy.

As usual, he rejoiced too soon. He had drawn only two weeks' salary when again the dogs of ill luck caught up with him. A strong wind arose just as the last hydrogen needed to fill the great envelope to capacity had been injected. Despite all efforts to save it the balloon broke away and shot skyward. Off it sailed seaward, and was last seen halfway to Honolulu.

It was a bad anticlimax after owning a balloon to go back to parachute jumps, changing from airplane to airplane and doing general stunt work, but Dick, like the majority of us, was not his own master. Thus he and I were thrown a good deal together. After all he had gone through I was glad that our joint stunts generally turned out to be successes.

Along came *The Eleventh Hour*, the film in which I made my happy escape from the lions. Dick Curwood and I had to supply the thrills for the picture, and the steel mills at Torrence were chosen as the scene for part of the action.

I'd never been through such a place before, and seeing the workers with their blackened faces, stripped to the waist, sweating among huge pots of molten metal and

gigantic vats of steaming water, I said to myself, "Give me the life of a stunt man!" It was just about as safe, and much cleaner.

One of the steel workers told me that, owing to the dust and terrific heat, the men were inclined to tuberculosis. The tissues were burned from their lungs! And as for accidents, when a man fell into a pot of red-hot metal they buried him, metal and all. That sounded pretty ghastly; but it seems that a man melts much sooner than metal does, so it would be useless trying to get his body out. This was sweet hearing for Dick and me, as our orders kept us playing around and above those big vats of bubbling iron.

Our first stunt at Torrence, however, wasn't apparently very difficult, though it held one or two unpleasant possibilities.

We had to scale a wall of the structure, some fifty feet high, and when we'd reached the top the next duty was to catch one of the big travelling cranes that transported loads of metal. Two feet below the crane, and parallel to the wall which we had to climb, were six highly charged live wires; and anybody who had enough English to read the warning words DANGER! 22,500 VOLTS on the walls at intervals could hardly fail to be impressed. Dick and I fully realized what might happen to us if we didn't handle our bodies with care.

Catching the crane ought to have been easy for men who thought little of doing changes in the air, etc., but who wouldn't rather push up a few daisies than be shocked to death?

The track on which the crane ran was just a little more than an inch in width. That meant nimble footwork or we would fall on those wires directly below. I had to follow Dick until we got above a small shop office, in fact, approximately thirty feet above it. This office was on an elevated cement floor about halfway between us and the crane, and its roof was made of glass.

Swinging directly over the glass roof, though thirty feet above, I was supposed to jump, break through the glass, and land underneath. Dick had then to jump shortly after I had made my leap.

He and I managed to scale the high wall (with cameras cranking of course), and to pass over the high-tension wires safely and to catch the crane. Then with Dick after me I ran to the centre of the moving metal carrier. Everything was nicely timed. I arrived just as the crane started to travel over the office, and jumped instantly so that Dick would have time to follow.

It's rather a peculiar sensation to hit a level surface which looks solid, though you know you have got to go right through it. I hit, shattered the whole roof, and carried down with me a rain of glass and broken frames. Strange to say, I did not get a cut! I hardly stopped to draw breath before crawling out of the way. Then I watched Curwood as he prepared to leap.

One of the toughest things about this game (I won't call it a "profession") is having to stand by helplessly and see a friend get hurt. Something mighty bad was due for Dick. I could see that before he jumped, but I could do nothing.

The hole I had made was waiting for him, and I knew he was aiming for it. But he stood there stiff-legged. His knees were locked, which meant certain injury. No one can land on cement from a height of thirty feet and take the shock with stiff knees, safely. A leap even of six inches, taken like this, can break your neck.

Dick jumped. And he jumped off balance—another error. When he hit it was with that crunching, shattering sound which only those who have seen fatal injuries of that kind recognize with a shudder. Just too late it occurred to me that I might break the fall by flinging my body under his as he landed. My one consolation was, later, that I couldn't have saved him from some damage, and that if I had got beneath him in time the company might have thrown the whole blame on me. Even Dick himself might have thought it would have helped if I'd let him alone.

As it was, Dick was done for, after his hard life of struggle and adventure. He lay there on a bed of broken glass, groaning, begging someone to kill him, to put him out of his pain. Almost at once the doctor was on hand, and gave him an injection. Five minutes later he was still. You could hardly hear him breathe. He looked like a dead man, but he was not dead. He was destined—doomed, I might say —to live with a broken back.

I didn't feel inclined for further stunts that night, but several were on my list. I had to be knocked under the chin, fall backward from a height of twenty-five feet, and land in two feet of water. Later I had to pass over the boiling vats of steel, and when I felt their terrific heat I got a peculiar thrill. One misstep, one error in judgment, and

down I'd go into the fire. Certainly a quick death! I could have made a bet that I wouldn't have time to let out one yap before I began to melt, as the steel workers did sometimes! Not all my previous experiences could keep me from thinking a bit, not only of poor Dick and many others who had been hurt or killed in the game, but of myself, too, and how, though I'd never refused a single stunt, here was I alive and well!

So *The Eleventh Hour* ended as a dozen other pictures had ended for me, without even a slight injury.

Either your number is up or it isn't, and of course mine had to emerge from the shuffle once in a while. A Fox film was to be done from a Rex Beach story, with George Archinbeau directing. In the cast were Evelyn Brent, Tom Santchi, and a good many other well-known people. The reason I got the offer was because in my years of stunt work at Hollywood (I'd had five years by this time) I had built up a reputation which some men might envy. I seldom missed a stunt; and very few times was it necessary to make retakes of anything I did. Consequently, though I asked high pay, studios considered it economical to engage me for anything that was in my line.

Mr. Ryan, the casting director, called me into his office and told me what I would have to do.

It seemed that a dance-hall set had been erected on Stage 1. It was supposed to be of the sort popular in the wilds of Alaska during the mad stampede of gold-rush days, and probably would have looked more or less familiar to Dick Curwood. A balcony, perhaps twenty feet above the main floor, was to be partitioned into booths.

And in these booths would be girls of the type which decorated dance halls in those days.

Being a place of revelry, liquor was supposed to be served, and in the course of a brawl some drunken sourdough was to throw a lighted match on the flimsy ballet dress of a dancer. Instantly the tulle, or whatever it was, would flare up, and the girl, wreathed in fire, would rush from the private table to the railing of the balcony. She would pause for a second, then desperately leap from the balcony onto the floor about twenty feet below. At this the hero, tearing off his coat, would wrap it around her, smothering the flames.

I, being of medium height, could easily double for the girl in medium and long shots. It wasn't the doubling that was difficult; it was the stunt. But it wasn't a new one to me. I had done the same thing before in a Dustin Farnum picture, so the thought of danger didn't worry me till later.

There was a difference of detail in this film, though, which was more serious than it seemed at first glance. In the Farnum picture I had doubled a man's part and had been dressed in a dinner suit. In the present one I would represent a girl in a fluffy ballet costume. That was a complication; and when I'd reflected upon it a little I didn't like the idea of the stunt. I foresaw that at best I would come out of it with a few minor burns, and besides, if I had a complex it was fire. My mother's great adventure with me as a baby in her arms, in a burning house, had probably left some impression in my subconsciousness. However, I needed the money to support the airplanes I

had accumulated with the rest of my equipment nearly as much as poor Curwood had needed it for the support of his children. Besides, there was my pride in never refusing a stunt, no matter how dangerous. But as I said, I didn't like it. And as the time drew near I developed one of those strange "hunches" or presentiments which come to me in my work. They seldom or never deceive me, and I began to feel that this was one of the times when I could not escape.

Still, there it *was!* I'd accepted the job, and it had to be done. I put on the ballet clothes mechanically, and as I looked my healthy body over, slipping into the tights and flimsy dress of the double, I wondered what the condition of that body would be a few minutes later.

I went to the set. Cameras were placed. The drama of the scene was pitched as usual. No one cared much about me. I was only the double for the stunt, and no one guessed or would have been interested in my mental reaction. If I hadn't wanted to do the thing why had I undertaken to do it?

The director gave me his last instructions, and I received them with outer calmness; but my heart beat fast as they soaked my clothing with gasoline and alcohol. At times when I had no presentiment there was no increase in the heartbeats while I prepared for a stunt, no matter how difficult. Doctors have always tested me before my latest stunts, for if my heart showed irregularity I should know I was no longer fit for the game.

I was ready. "Cameras!" The word clicked from the mouth of the director.

"Set him on fire!"

That was a bad moment. I rather think I prayed.

The property boy threw a lighted match at me, keeping a respectful distance himself, and instantly I became a human torch. Flames leaped eighteen feet above my head. Something had gone wrong. This wasn't according to plan.

Not that I was thinking about that, then. I wasn't thinking at all. I was feeling. I had never dreamed of such agony. I was burning to death, the worst death man or animal can suffer. The terrific heat scorched my lungs. It seared my flesh, bit into my muscles. Even through my anguish of pain the smell of my own burnt flesh sickened me. I can smell it again now, and feel the horror, as I write. If I live to be old I can never forget.

"Help! My God, I'm burning to death!" I cried. Frantically I leaped down the stairs, landing so hard that I broke a two-by-four in the floor below. Then I was up again, half mad and yet fully conscious, running round and round in a circle to prevent the flames from entering my lungs. All the while I remembered to keep my face covered with my arms, though the flames licked my armpits. I don't know how I did that. Perhaps it was instinct. Or maybe I was recalling unconsciously some faces I'd seen as a result of war.

"For God's sake, put me out! Put out the fire!" I begged.

Just then the assistant director stepped in and tripped me up. It was he who saved my life. Gordon Hollingshead. To him I owe what is left of me.

He wrapped me in blankets, and fought desperately

with the flames. But it was hard work—almost more than he could do. First the flames would shoot out near my head, then from my feet. For more than two minutes, which seemed to me like years, I burned and burned. Then I lapsed into unconsciousness, but not for long.

When I woke to my misery again a few seconds later it was to realize that my body was a charred, blackened mass. From head to waist all my skin was burned off. I rubbed one of my charred arms over my chest and bits of the flesh dropped away from my arm. Clothes, skin, flesh were all one indistinguishable mass of blackened cinders. The thought of myself as I now was nauseated me; but just to prove that I wasn't down and out, I rose to my elbow, then staggered to my feet, and with the help of the ever-present doctor walked to my dressing room.

Another stunt finished! I had been paid for it, and *I* had paid—according to the doctor—with just seven hundred and eighty-six square inches of skin. "Now you know," he said to me, "exactly what it is to burn to death. You couldn't have suffered more had you gone through death itself by fire."

And after all that gasoline had done to me the doctor washed me off with it! The agony of this treatment sent me wild—crazy. Gasoline on raw flesh! But at last I was given an injection; and then I "went for a ride"—a ride to the hospital.

I thought I had said my last good-bye to stunts, as well as to the world. Not that I cared much. Thanks to Dr. Dickey that I am among those present, but with a third

of my body burned to a crisp, in some places half an inch deep, I didn't see how I could ever be well and fit to face life again. Queer how Nature helps doctors, though. I'll never quit the game unless I'm maimed. And the public must have its thrills.

XV

THE "MASTEH"

Men in my game have their favorite hospital, just as those in quieter professions have their favorite tailors.

Now, as I was rushed to the refuge I most often patronized, I mused semi-consciously. "Well, what if I have missed one stunt after bringing off all the rest in a six months' stretch? Anyhow, I'll get a good rest."

I was received like an old friend by the staff, who knew as much about my anatomy as most people know about their best friends' faces, and for a week I did get that rest —as good a one as pain would let me take. At the end of that time I was told I might have my visiting hours, and people did their best to show I hadn't been forgotten.

I was pretty well tired out after a day of kind tributes when I was told that a "gentleman wished to see me on a matter of importance."

"He's got a basket of about four dozen red roses in his hand," said my nurse.

That sounded funny. Gentlemen don't usually shower roses on stunt men. I thought of all the girls I knew. Was any one of them likely to send a father, brother, or boy friend on such an errand?

"What does the gentleman look like?" I asked.

"He looks a little like an Oriental," said the nurse. "But he's dressed in European clothes."

The description didn't fit any of my surmises, but it intrigued me. I decided that, after all, I wasn't too tired to see one more visitor before closing hours.

The nurse, evidently as curious as I was, brought "the gentleman" in. She might have lingered; but that Chinese Buddha in tailored tweeds made it evident that nothing more exciting than "How do you do?" would pass his thin, yellowish lips until we were left alone.

As I gave him the once-over I judged him to be of Chinese extraction, with his close-shaven head, his pointed chin, and narrow, brooding eyes. He had good features, though slightly wrinkled, but I didn't place him as a Chinese gentleman. Neither did he look like a servant, but as he bowed and deposited the basket of roses on my bedside table he said:

"My masteh admiah Misteh Glace, so sendee li'l' flowehs."

"He's a friend of mine?" I queried.

"Yes, velly much good fliend, but Misteh Glace not know him."

"Then why in—— I mean why does he send me flowers?" I asked.

"He admiah Misteh Glace' big blaveness, like I tell you," the man went on. "He see you on Bloadway jump flum high building and do many, many otheh things. He enjoy velly much watch Misteh Glace. He follow Misteh Glace do one —what you call big stunt—afteh anotheh. So he send wishes fo' Misteh Glace be soon well, with this basket of

li'l' flowehs. And those not all. He give me letteh hand Misteh Glace, open when I gone, but please, when Misteh Glace alone."

All this began to have a fishy sound to me, and I didn't like it much. But the man left me no time to argue. He laid a large sealed envelope on the bed near my hand, and was out of the room with the door shut behind him before I could get out a question.

Not so much because I was alone, as the mysterious "masteh" wished, as because I was curious, I didn't waste a minute in opening the envelope.

What I expected to find inside the thing I hardly knew, but thought it likely to be something idiotic in the way of praise from some silly "fan."

He seemed to have used a lot of paper anyhow, I thought, as I drew forth a packet so fat it tore the envelope as it came out. But the gray sheet of paper that matched was only a wrapping, and I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw what it contained. There was no letter; not a word of writing. The gray paper had been folded around several government notes. The upper one was for a hundred dollars. Staring and bewildered, I looked through the rest as I counted. There were ten in all, and each for a hundred dollars.

A good many strange things had happened to me between the time I took my first flight and the time when I had this last accident that brought me back to the hospital; but this seemed almost the strangest.

An Oriental "gentleman" sent by a "masteh" with a gift of red roses and a thousand dollars, and not a word

of explanation! I didn't know what to make of it at all.

Though I earned big sums of money, I spent what I got about as fast as it came in, and I could do very well with his donation. But I had no intention of putting this to use. I knew there must be something very queer about it, unless the donor was wrong in the head; but I decided not to take anyone into my confidence until the affair had developed, as it was pretty sure to do, in one way or the other.

I wondered what would be the "follow up" after this peculiar lead. But there was none. Ten days after the mysterious visit I was dismissed from the hospital, well enough to have my wounds dressed at home. I had fastened the envelope with the "grand" inside and put it among my other letters. At home it had been transferred to the back of a drawer where I kept handkerchiefs and collars. If it hadn't been for that envelope and what was in it I should have forgotten the whole incident in the many other, more important, things I had to think of.

I'd been at home only long enough to have the privilege of being left alone when one night the doorbell rang. There was only one person to answer, and that was myself. I hobbled to the door, and there stood a man. It was dark outside, and darkish in my hall, but I could see just well enough to be sure I was facing a stranger.

"Good-evening," he began in a pleasant, educated voice that sounded just a little foreign. "You don't know me, so I must introduce myself. But I hope you will let me have a few words with you alone. I have a very important business offer to make to you."

I reflected quickly that without much doubt he had already made sure as possible that I *was* alone. He might be a bootlegger soliciting a client, or even a hold-up artist, but as I possessed little worth taking I didn't hesitate more than a few seconds to invite him in.

I ushered my guest into the living room where I'd turned on the lights. Another Oriental, or anyhow with a dash of blood Mongolian or Caucasian! Instantly I associated him with my visitor in the hospital. I'd have been ready to bet that here was the "masteh." But I kept a poker face, and even when he laconically informed me of the fact in so many words I pretended not to understand what he meant. I wanted to make him talk while I asked questions or just listened.

"But perhaps you do understand," he said quietly, his black eyes and his black hair glistening in the light that fell over his square-jawed face. He might have been about forty, and he was dressed like a well-off business man in that everyday life of Los Angeles.

"A few weeks ago when you were in hospital I sent you a small gift," he reminded me. "It was in the hope of binding us together in future business associations. Also to prove that I put implicit trust in you. My word is as good as my bond, and I'm sure yours is."

"Oh!" I said. "So it was you who sent me those nice roses and—er——"

"A gray envelope."

"Containing?"

"One thousand dollars in hundred-dollar bills."

"We agree on that. The money is still in the envelope.

As pretty as "a painted ship upon a painted ocean"—except for the pilot.

I've been wondering when I'd hear from the sender. I thought there sure must be some mistake."

"No mistake," said the "masteh." "The thousand was sent as a small sample of what you can earn in the work I've come here to-night to speak about."

"I'm under contract," I said. "I don't see how I could take up anything outside at present."

"When we have had a talk I think I can make you see that your professional engagements won't interfere with what I have to offer. Do you object to mentioning the sum you earn per year, Mr. Grace?"

I was tempted to tell him that it was none of his business what I earned, but my curiosity prevented an answer that might shut him up. "Oh, sometimes I have a good year," I replied evasively, "and sometimes one not so good."

"Do you total over twenty thousand in your good years?" he persisted.

"No."

"Well, then, you are being underpaid. With your daring you are worth many times twenty thousand a year, to the right people. I can see where in a few months you could become financially independent for life. How would you like, Mr. Grace, to make a fortune in a short time? Listen. I'll trust you in this, if you agree. The thousand is yours in any case. And *if you'll work under my orders for three nights* I'll put in your bank to your credit seventy-five thousand dollars."

"Good Lord!" I gasped. "What do you want me to do?"

The "masteh" smiled, not a good-natured smile. Still, it was a sort of smile. "Will you assure me of this: whether

we come to an agreement or not, am I speaking to you in confidence?"

I looked the man over for a minute without making up my mind what to answer, so he spoke again.

"I presume the agent I sent to see you at the hospital told you of my admiration for your work. I chose you for this offer on that account. Only an exceptionally experienced flier could undertake and carry out what I want."

"Oh, it's got something to do with flying?" I mumbled.

"It has a great deal to do with flying."

"Hm!" I said. "It doesn't sound—well, it doesn't sound straight to me."

"That depends on what you call 'straight.' Liquor is forbidden in this country. Do you never drink any?"

I had to grin at this.

"If you were over in Tia Juana and someone handed you a present of a diamond ring or a fine string of pearls for your best girl would you slip it in your pocket for her or would you declare it to the customs?"

"I hope I'd declare it," I said.

"But maybe you'd be tempted."

I shrugged my shoulders. "I guess I'm getting onto this," I said. "You want to hire me for a smuggling job. Is that it? It must be a big one, too, if you'd pay at the rate you just mentioned."

"It is big and I would pay at that rate. The United States government and I are the two powers who control the law of supply and demand in necessities and luxuries. They die—they worse than die—they suffer unspeakable torture without those necessities. It is cruel of the law to

make citizens of the United States suffer as no decent man would make a mad dog suffer. Now I've gone so far I'll explain further. The situation is this. I deal in the wholesale importation of nationally banned drugs. You can't prevent me from dealing in them. If you don't work with me someone else will. And you *can't* work against me. I'll tell you why not if you force me to do so. But as you can't stop me, why not put your conscience to sleep, if you're troubled with such a cancerous growth, and work for me? Morphine, opium, heroin, cocaine, are my merchandise. There are thousands, millions, who must have them or hell. I consider myself a benefactor by giving them what they want."

"You're some Samaritan!" I said.

He took it that I made this remark by way of a pleasant joke, and that he was getting around me.

"Our problem is getting the supplies in any quantity from Mexico into the United States. Never mind how we get it into Mexico. That's not your affair. Nor how we get our diamonds, a side line of ours that's very profitable and would help to swell your bank balance. Our base is approximately sixty miles distant from the border. Great quantities of—our merchandise can be collected in a few hours, or even less. The difficulty is transportation to Los Angeles. This is the only strategic entrance for our stuff into the United States. Our organization is powerful here, as you must realize by this time, and capture within our boundaries is hardly to be feared. You see why I called Los Angeles the one "strategic" entrance in the States from Mexico. The city is only one hundred and thirty miles

from the border. And by *airplane* the trip takes but a little more than an hour."

The man stopped and eyed me, but I was flabbergasted. I let him go on.

"With a large, fast airplane," he went on, in his soft, hypnotic voice, "operated by a competent pilot like yourself, success is sure. The craft I would give you would outmanœuvre any of those that patrol. It should make more than one hundred miles per hour fully loaded for a thousand-mile non-stop journey. This pilot would take off at dusk from any local field. He would fly directly out to sea for fifty miles and then turn south. By compass and watch he would know when he was safely within Mexican waters. Then he would head inland and alight. Within an hour he would be supplied with gas, oil, and his return load: twelve hundred pounds of cargo ten times as valuable as platinum. Again he would go out to sea, then make for Los Angeles. But—of course he wouldn't alight at any of the fields. At a secluded, pre-arranged landing place well-hidden automobiles would await his arrival. The pilot himself would not land, however; he would merely swoop close to the ground, pull a lever, and let the strong cases drop. His work finished, all he'd have to do would be to fly quietly back to his home field.

"Now, Mr. Grace, you have the proposition and the programme. You are the man we want in our organization. We're willing to go to any reasonable limit to attract you. As I said, you can go on with your ordinary work, and keep an engagement with us at the same time. The combine of which I am the head offers you, for each of the two first

successful trips, twenty thousand dollars. For the third successful trip, which means making delivery at a certain spot at a certain early hour of the morning, you will receive thirty-five thousand. This is the best 'get-rich-quick' opportunity that's ever likely to come your way. Without mishap you should collect within one month from now as much as you're likely ever to make just stunting around —and your money is safe for we put it in escrow for you."

"Do you mean to tell me," I almost gasped, "that you dare use the escrow departments for such a purpose?"

"Certainly. How otherwise should we be safeguarded?" the amazing personage replied. "When a man enters into a contract with our combine we let him choose a piece of property equal to the value of the agreement. Then we buy the property. If and when he fulfills his agreement with us, we turn it over to him. For instance, suppose you became associated with us. We will buy real estate of your selection worth seventy-five thousand dollars. After you've accomplished one successful trip it counts as if you'd made a twenty-thousand-dollar payment on the property. Do you see?"

I saw all right; and it would be a lie to say I wasn't tempted. Here was what seemed to me, at my age, a dazzling fortune. And it would be almost as easy for me to pick it up as it is for a boy to rob a bird's nest. The "masteh" had tried to make me believe, too, that it wouldn't be much wickeder than egg stealing. With what he offered I could do, while I was still young, all the unbelievable things my wildest dreams had pictured coming to me after half a lifetime of hard, grinding work.

For years I might stunt for screen producers, if I was lucky, and not accumulate any such sum. As for the risk, why, it didn't compare with the most ordinary dangers I ran six days out of the week! That, I saw, was the chief reason why this offer was being made to me. The "masteh" and his gang knew that personal hazards didn't count much in my life!

The man let me alone to think things over for a minute, and then got impatient.

"Come now, Mr. Grace, show your practical common sense. If you don't take this great chance another man will, depend on it. You'll *prevent* nothing by refusing—except the filling of your own pockets. Hundreds of men would snap at an offer of less money. They'd beg for it. But you are the man we want."

I did hesitate. I heard him repeating his words, "only supplying a demand; saving unfortunate people from torture." Then my thoughts jumped from that snug property in escrow to my father. Why, he himself had said to me, "Opportunity knocks only once at the door," and my father's maxims had always meant a great deal to me. But what would he say about *this* "opportunity"? Three trips, to unload in the United States about four thousand pounds of forbidden drugs and smuggled diamonds. The money the gang stood to make would total millions!

Perhaps it was seeing my father's honest face and fearing his voice as if he were in the room which made me jump up from my chair before I spoke. I walked straight to a desk where a gray envelope lay under a lot of loose stationery. I took out the envelope and handed it to the "masteh."

"Here," I said. "I guess this is my answer to your whole proposition. Count the money, will you?"

"You're a fool—a fool!" the man broke out in a burst of rage.

"You're right about that if about nothing else," I agreed. "Every stunt man is a fool. I'm only one more."

"And the biggest!" said the "masteh."

Instead of taking the envelope I held out he lighted a cigarette.

While I waited for him to put the cigarette in his mouth and throw away the match, suddenly I felt a small, round, unmistakable object press deep into the middle of my back. I didn't turn round—thought it might be a mistake to do so—or move in any direction, but I think I was too much surprised to be exactly frightened.

It hadn't occurred to me to lock the front door after letting in my visitor. As usual I'd left it on the latch, and as my back had been turned to the living-room entrance since the beginning of our talk, it had been easy for a confederate to tiptoe softly in. Probably he'd been in the room for some time, just awaiting a signal.

"Your friend didn't wait for an invitation, did he?" I said.

The "masteh," knowing it would be inconvenient for me to move just then, pulled an automatic from his own pocket. "Stick 'em up!" he gave the classic command.

I stuck them up, with the envelope still in my hand.

"Now, Mr. Grace, watch while I pay for your body," he said. He helped himself to the envelope, keeping me covered, and a nod from him released the pressure in my

back. The gentleman with the gun walked round to survey me from the front. My guesses had been wrong. It wasn't my hospital acquaintance but a stranger, and not so nice to look at as the messenger had been. This one's nose had been badly manhandled.

By the way he eyed me, however, it seemed as if we'd have at least a bowing acquaintance soon. The "masteh" eyed me also. In fact, he didn't remove his gaze from my face, even as he passed the gray envelope to his broken-nosed pet. I guessed at once that the "payment for my body" was being made, and the surmise was confirmed as Broken Nose was told to count the bills.

"Put them in your pocket," he directed. "Now, look this fool over so that you can't miss recognizing him under any circumstances. It will be your business to watch him after this. If he attempts to cause us trouble of any sort you are authorized by me to give him the works."

"Right," replied the other. "I get you."

The boss didn't think further words necessary in that direction. He addressed me. "And he'll 'get' you if you're not careful, Grace. Are you sure now you see what a bribe I can offer for your life in a town where I can buy or sell most men's for a hundred and fifty? Are you sure you don't wish to change your mind?"

"Sure," said I. And I was as sure as I'd ever been of anything in my life. Not only that, I was sure of another wish: to get even with these bums for this hold-up act if nothing else.

"You are crazy as well as a fool," he said. "Don't you realize now that if I choose I can *force* you to work for me?"

"I never heard," said I, "that even if you take a horse to water you can force him to drink."

"If you don't realize the truth you will later," he threatened, not in a blustering tone, but one that was soft and disgustingly gentle. Still staring at me, he gave a slight jerk of his head, and before I had time to move his henchman hit me just back of the ear. When I awoke they were gone.

I had had a few bumps already and one more didn't matter. But this one made me madder than all the rest, and I cursed myself for not having told my attorney about the mysterious gift in the gray envelope.

I had had just sense enough at the time to suspect something more or less criminal, but hadn't had any other motive for a more or less expensive legal chat, so hadn't even thought of putting the matter in a lawyer's hands. Had I done so, we might somehow have traced the criminals. As it was, he explained to me that it seemed as if I'd let the horse be stolen before the stable doors were shut. He took the matter very seriously and warned me that without doubt I was in danger.

Well, that didn't worry me much. All my lawyer could persuade me to do by way of safeguard was to telephone him twice every day. I was to tell him, not only how and where I was, what I meant to do, and so on, but whether I'd received any more threats. He thought it likely there would be some, or an attempt at deeds stranger than threats, for if I was being watched "they" would be sure to know I'd visited him.

Though the "masteh" had hidden his own identity from

me he had had to give away some details (such as the gang's plans, and the distance of their supply base over the Mexican border), and all his prudence in trying to engage me couldn't screen him completely. He would feel that he wasn't as safe as he might be.

"As long as he'll be feeling that way, you'd better feel the same," my attorney advised. And he wasn't wrong, because a week later another little thing happened.

I'd been having a hard day flying, and ten miles out of Los Angeles I got into my automobile headed for home. It was dusk, with sunset slowly streaked with crimson. I was just thinking that life was really an enjoyable adventure when—*bing!* a shot rang out.

My car was running along a lonely stretch of boulevard, and I jammed on the brakes.

A bullet had missed and the next mightn't. So I stopped the car and there was the man I expected—the gunman. He walked up and examined the radiator.

"Maybe you thought my shot went wide," he said coolly. "It didn't. See!"

The motometer was broken, glass and all. A bullet had passed directly through the centre. The gunman came to the side of the car, gun in hand. I was unarmed. "This is just to show you!" he barked. "Keep your trap tighter shut than you have done, Buddy; that's a straight tip. Attorneys may be good for some folks sometimes, but not for you *this* time. See? Now beat it and don't look back or you'll look into *hell*."

I beat it. But when I got home too late to catch my

lawyer at his office I called his house. He was in, and I went round to see him. He advised me to do no more telephoning for the present.

Next day I had cause to remember a warning of the "masteh's": "We can force you to join us," or words to that effect.

I drew one of my airplanes from its hangar at the aviation field, and after warming it up thoroughly and testing its various assembly, I climbed into the cockpit for a stunt that I was due to make.

I decided to fly over Hollywood first while gaining altitude, and when near my home field put the ship through its paces. I was soon above the heart of the town, and after circling a few times I started again fieldward. Hardly had I nosed the ship in that direction than I developed a miss. Then in quick succession the cylinders refused to fire. I was losing altitude, and knew that I should have to land.

There was but one hope of avoiding a serious mishap, and that was to land on a main thoroughfare. So I selected Wilshire Boulevard. Picking a spot clear of automobiles, I glided to a stop, though not without causing a sensation. A slight examination showed me that all of the points on my spark plugs had been sawed partly through.

The work had been done by no novice, that was sure. He had known that my motor would function perfectly until the heat had burned or bent the weakened points, causing a complete miss of the cylinders. Apparently no other parts had been tampered with. I had to hand it to that bird. I'd mixed up with SOME game!

My attorney wanted to have me guarded by detectives, but I wouldn't stand for that. Life wouldn't be worth living. Besides, what could they do?

I went on as if nothing had happened, and as time passed nothing more did happen! I'd begun to think that perhaps the gang had given me up as a bad job when one night about eleven o'clock I was starting out from home for a party, with a friend. My car was parked before the house, and to my disgust I saw that I had a flat tire. I immediately prepared to change it, and while I was getting the tools I heard a slight scuffling noise. My back had been turned to my friend just long enough for him to be seized by a couple of men.

I jumped for them, but a third man sprang from behind a tree. "Stick 'em up!" came the old familiar words. To cut a long story short, my friend and I, with gags in our mouths, were herded with less difficulty than we liked into a big touring car. We were being taken for a ride.

The public is fairly familiar with the routine of some excursions these days. I hardly need to say that there was no pleasant chat during this trip. It was one of those silent dramas, but I enlivened it for myself by a good deal of thinking, and I was pretty sure that my friend was occupying his mind in the same way.

We tore through the night, and it was only because I have a sense of direction that I wasn't completely confused. "Bound for Chinatown," I deduced.

Down a side street off Main we whisked. As we passed a dark two-story building the driver of the car gave three sharp blasts with the horn, and I caught the return signal:

a small, red electric bulb flashing twice. Chinese began to pour out of the houses, and I guessed, when we drove round the block, that the man at the wheel was simply marking time. He'd be back when enough of them were gathered to remove us without a fuss.

Two of the gang sat between my friend and me. I would have given all I had for a word with him, but even without it there was one thing I could count on. He had no connection with the affair, as the boss's spies must know, if they'd watched my movements as well as I imagined. They had brought him along only to keep him from giving an alarm too soon, and rather than kill unnecessarily, they'd release him when they could safely do so. I was the goat! Knowing this, I decided to take a chance for myself if I could get a break.

The quickness acquired in my stunt work helped me as nothing else could. As one of our gunmen leaned across to the other, I dived head first from the car. My shoulders hit the pavement, but there was no perceptible pause between that blow and the spring that brought me to my feet—running. As I turned a corner a bullet hit the bricks and rather served to increase my speed.

My friend reached my house not long after I did. He had been thrown out of the touring car.

I rather expected another attack from a new quarter, but none ever came. That was the end of my experience with that mob. As for the "masteh," though my night "ride" was the last of him and his manœuvres so far as I was concerned, many things have convinced me, and others, that he and his group still exist, still function, and

still operate or attempt to operate a drug ring which has for its scope the whole of our United States.

"The last of him so far as I was concerned" was as I said. But I happen to know that the big plan wasn't given up just because I refused to carry it out. There were others to rely on.

There was one whose name I won't mention. Whether his bribe was as big as the one offered to me I don't know. Maybe not, since his reputation for daring wasn't much better than that for his morals. Anyhow, he'd snapped up the bait. "They" bought him a good ship for the venture, a popular make of monoplane capable of making 125 m. p. h. He took it to Mexico and landed it there. But schemes will go wrong at times.

After the ship was loaded the Mexican government caught on (must have had a tip) and made a surprise visit just at the critical moment. The pilot contrived to escape, but the monoplane was captured. No doubt the gang would have preferred it the other way round.

They had to lose the ship, but they couldn't bear to let the Mexicans rejoice over it. Some members slipped past the guard, or greased their palms, removed the spark plugs, and put nitroglycerine into the cylinders. When the switch was turned on and the propeller began to revolve the ship was blown to pieces.

It interested me to get this news, but it would have interested me more had I not just at that time given myself something quite as absorbing to think of. The wounds left under my arms by the fire had webbed in healing. My

doctor said I would never again be able to lift my arms high over my head. I didn't like that prophecy, which, if it came true, would put me off the list of stunt men. So I stood before a mirror and cut the webs with a razor blade.

Now I can raise my arms as high as anyone.

XVI

AËRIAL STUNTING

Dick Curwood was in the hospital for three months, in a cast that covered a greater portion of his body. He certainly began to look as though he would not pull through. His cheeks were sunken and his eyes seemed set so far back in his head that they could hardly be seen.

However, once he was released from the cast he gained rapidly. But it had broken him financially. It is true that we get our hospital and funeral expenses. Also that we draw twenty dollars and eighty-three cents a week while injured. But how far would this go to support yourself and two children?—which was what Dick was doing. Moreover, when the insurance doctors released him altogether he was unfit for work. He was well as far as they were concerned, but not for the type of things which are pushed to us.

Then he received an offer to do one of the biggest stunts of his career, and he asked my help in getting the job. Really I had already applied for it—exploding an airplane in the air by placing dynamite in the front cockpit and in the gas tank. The price I had quoted for the thing was thirty-five hundred dollars. Dick told me his, which

was little more than half of that. So I promised him that I'd stick to the one I had made, thus sewing up the job for him.

He got it, and both of us were pleased. Still he was actually no pilot. I think that he had flown by himself very few times. But we fixed that up by getting him instruction and then a ship to use for a few hours.

Finally both the company and he were set for the flight, and so the entire troupe except Dick went to the location. He followed in the loggy old Standard J1 a couple of days later. Some of the equipment of the navy was used for camera work, including the F-5-L naval bombers.

Dick's ship was loaded with explosive, which was arranged so that after he pressed the button which ignited a fuse he would have ten seconds in which to leave the ship by parachute before the blast occurred. Previous experience in packing 'chutes came in handy now. This was once when the thing had to open as soon as he pulled the ring, yet he must delay the action long enough to let him fall clear of the débris from the ship.

All was in readiness. The ship was loaded with its deadly cargo, the motor tested, and the back pack carefully folded and slipped into its cover. And Dick, true to the heritage of all real stunt men, was the coolest one on the troupe.

Yet who would blame him if he were not? It takes guts—intestinal fortitude—to do some of these things. Imagine yourself actually getting into a ship, not being an expert pilot, to go into the air some twenty-five hundred feet. And when you get there you have to press that button. A slight little pressure on a small little button, but it means

so much. It means that if you don't jump immediately, if you don't clear the ship, if you don't keep from pulling the rip cord on the 'chute long enough, you'll be blown to atoms.

But he was cool. His immobile face was set for the job, but showed no fear, no emotion. As he crawled into the cockpit the huge bombing ships received a signal and took to the air. It was also a signal for Dick. His motor was warmed and revved up. Then the chocks were removed and he gave it the gun. He was off. And he was plenty anxious to get to the proper altitude and do his stuff. Why? With that load of death distributor in the front anyone would. Vibration or a rough bump might cause a short. Then there would be instantaneous explosion and fire, wings, motor, and a body all floating in space. That would not be good.

It took almost a full hour to get to the right height and position, but finally they were all flying in formation. Some camera ships above, others below. The wings of the big bombers wiggled their O. K. signal. Then came an answering wavering from the old Standard. Dick was ready. The cameras started to grind.

Evidently he had pressed the button, for he could be seen starting to crawl to the side of the ship for his dive. But he never got over. Without the slightest warning the entire ship blew to pieces. The explosions were premature. Either the fuses were too short or they had shorted. At any rate there was just the slightest fraction of time between that fatal press of the button and the white cloud. Sprays of burning gasoline and débris were thrown in all direc-

tions. Dick was in the midst of it. One of his first sensations was none at all. He was knocked out of the ship cleaner than the motor was. And he told me that the thing that woke him up was a piece of shattered wing that tapped him as it passed.

Anyway, when he thought that he and the débris had passed each other a sufficient number of times he finally gathered enough of his dizzy brains to pull the ring. The pilot 'chute immediately popped out, and the long string of parachute followed. Of course it was a great satisfaction to him to see the big parasol fill with air, but at the same time it was cause for consternation. In a dozen little places it was burning, where the gasoline had sprayed or fallen on it.

With his usual cool quick mind he realized that it was up to him to save himself. If this menace continued long he could not. When sufficient area of the silk burned he would drop faster than the ship had, and it was already at the bottom of the ocean.

Of course he could not climb up and blow out these fire patches, but he did the next best thing. He yanked the shroud lines on one side with all of his strength. This partially closed the 'chute, pulling it together at the bottom so that the air would not get in to fill it. After falling for a couple of hundred feet he let it fill again and looked up. Now there were but a few burning places. Again he repeated the process. Successful. A few minutes later he was struggling in the water, the stunt a success. It was a matter of seconds to get out of the harness, by which time the speed boats were there to pick him up.

Every time that I saw Dick after this he bemoaned the fact that they had burned holes in his best parachute.

Shortly after Dick did this extraordinary stunt I quit pictures temporarily. I was given a chance to rise in politics. That is, they wanted me to fly an embryo politician around and over the city, which was all right in one way and all wrong in another. All of the flying was to be done under a thousand feet.

When you're over the field and your motor quits this is all right, you know where you are. But when the OX5 pops and sputters when you're over a great city, where are you?

But I undertook the job. Partially for the money, but more because Bill Camp, the politician, was a friend of mine. We had his name spread on the sides and bottom of the fuselage and also under the wings. To attract the attention of the populace further huge police sirens were installed on either side of the motor. Then, gathering together some twenty thousand handbills, which were tied in packages of five thousand, and a policeman to throw them, we took to atmosphere.

I circled most of the congested district of the city several times, giving the officer of the law violent nods of assent that everything was set, and to break the cords binding the bundles. But he sat there as dumb as any mummy ever taken from Egypt. So finally I decided things must take the proper course. I banked, came up into a vertical, and then nosed earthward. How should I know that that policeman was scared before I did that stunt? Well,

he was, and when I went into that little unusual turn he just heaved everything that he had in his lap right into the air. Twenty thousand bills all tied together. Then he grabbed leather and hung on.

When I had fought off a couple of the bundles I was immediately terrified with the possible results.

Something of the nature had occurred to me years before, when doing stunts at a fair. My motors burned castor oil and in those days it was impossible to get it any place but drug stores. So I always had a supply of quart bottles in the front cockpit. Well, I went into a loop on this one exhibition, and the straps holding my tools and the bottles broke loose, right when I was on my back on the top of a loop. One hit me, but I ducked the rest. I landed immediately to see what damage had been done and was just viewing the probable spot when one farmer said to another, "You know, it's the gosh-all-hangedest thing you ever hear'n tell. I was standin' next onto the front wheel of Lizzie, just about to take a step, and somethin' whizzed past my straw hat. Can't say as how I felt it, but it passed, an' when I looked at the ground I'll be gol-durned if all I could see was a hole with oil coming out'n it!"

That was enough for me. I alternately paled and flushed as I thought how quickly that man might have taken a dose of castor oil.

So I was equally perturbed when this policeman threw everything to ten winds. And was not much relieved to see all the bundles plop right down in the centre of the city hall.

After this I decided that the councilman had to take

responsibility himself. So I made him fly with me. The next trip he wanted all of the dodgers dropped in the ball park while a game was on. Each one of the handbills had all of the reasons why he should be starred in the city council, and all were news to me. I just knew him personally, not politically. Anyway, we gathered another armful and started for the game.

It was a nice warm day and everyone's girl was there, because Mr. Wrigley lets the ladies in free. So the stands were pretty full. We circled a couple of times, getting about an inning of the game free, and then I got into position for the bombardment.

I gave the usual nod. He started cutting loose, and didn't quit until he had emptied the entire lot into the air. I could tell that they were going to be a direct hit and smiled with a little satisfaction over my good judgment. Then I banked around to watch them float in.

Which they did. All in one great cloud, covering the sky from home base to back fence. But it was just my luck to have the star of the game hit a high fly into that bunch of flutters, and I guess the poor guy in the outfield thought every piece was a baseball. Anyway, he caught the wrong one, and the last I saw as we headed for home was one grand rush for the umpire.

Well, on the way home I got to thinking over all of this foolishness and decided that politics was just as much of a game as my own. One minute you're up and the next you're down. To me this was a lot of horsing around.

So I came in to make a real conservative landing, when

bang! Someone sneaked up and caught my aileron. I really did see him, but pretended not to, because I had a clear right of way. However, if I hadn't given him a little room he might have cracked us both.

We have regulations now governing that sort of thing, but then we had no Department of Commerce, and it was up to us to stop such nuisances. I caught a good look at him as he passed. It was Hubert Kittle, one of the craziest fliers that ever held a stick, and it rather burned me up to see him laugh as he flew by. My injured left-wing control was too loose to do anything but fly straight, so I stayed up until I saw him land and taxi up to the line. Then I got back and glided in. I came closer and closer, stalling always as I got near his ship.

Just as it seemed inevitable that I should hit him I saw him jump out and try to pull the wing down so I could glide over. When but a short distance back of his standing ship, I gave full gun and nosed upward, slapping his top wing with my tail skid.

I cut and landed immediately, taxiing up and turning about so our wing tips almost touched. He was already out. I got out. I could see the hole I had worn in his upper section. We passed the casual "How-do-you-do's" and I walked to the office. He never bothered us in the air after that. But he did end up rather sensationally. He would lie on the floor and try to ricochet bullets from its glazed surface to his chinaware on the wall. Eventually he committed suicide.

Which is almost what I made Bob Rose do. Bob had

been working with Ruth Roland for some time when I contracted to do some aviation work in one of her thrillers to be directed by George Marshall.

I thought we had done everything that it was possible to do with an airplane, but when I got halfway through that serial I felt like quitting and going back for more instruction. George was easy on me, though, because he also had been an aviator in the war, so he didn't expect any more of me than he could have gotten in northern France.

One day Joe McKlusky came up to me in a friendly way and said: "Dick, my friend, how would you like to fly to-day?" and whenever he said that I knew that he and George had concocted some stunt.

But this time Bob was in on it. Bob had to hang to the last rung of a rope ladder while I dragged him through part of the Pacific Ocean. The cameras were to be set at the end of the breakwater.

A couple of hours later we were all set and Bob and I took off with our pet rope ladder.

Now Bob is cool and mathematical. I've never seen him do a single stunt except by mathematics. Not the kind you get in school, but the fine mathematics of a calculating mind. And when I showed him the big whitecaps swelling ten or twelve feet high, out where we were to perform, he agreed that it was not the safest thing in the world to do. There was a high wind, too, that made it bad, because at the angle of the set-up we could not go against it, but necessarily with it. This increased our speed considerably. And to add to our discomfort the navy started target

Making ready for a nonchalant drop to a plane below.

practice on our course. To them a picture or a stunt man or two meant nothing at all. The air was rocky and plenty rough from the concussions and air disturbances caused by the big guns.

But we started. At the proper spot Bob let the rope down, and waited until I got into position. I swooped down and soon was skimming along about twenty-five feet from the water. My speed was excessive, travelling with the wind. Then with all the adverse conditions we hit one of those bumps caused by the navy smoke blowers. I suddenly knew that I was about to dip a stunt man into the water. I was undecided whether I was going in or not. The nose of my ship shot seaward and—in went Bob. It was almost sure to be his last stunt, for we did not even have a safety boat standing by.

I yanked back on the controls and gave the motor full gun. Slowly it responded, and kept me from taking a ducking also.

For a couple of hundred feet I kept bumping the rope ladder in the water before I could get lift enough finally to clear the big rollers. Quickly I turned around. If I could locate Bob in those churning waters I'd be willing to duck the ship in, in a last attempt to keep him from drowning. He was nowhere to be seen—evidently had been knocked unconscious in the first slap against the waves, and had gone under. I signalled shoreward, but of course they could not guess what I meant. How cold and uninviting that water looked! How deadly and funeral-like. Knowing that water is almost as hard as the earth when struck at great speed or from a great height, I could hope

that he had been killed by the first impact. It would be easier than swallowing the ocean.

I could not see the rope ladder, because it was directly below the ship. But I knew that it was there. I could feel it turn and twist in the wind. And now that Bob was gone I'd have to land with it dangling.

Then a hand appeared over the side of the wing, followed by another—then a bleeding face. The clothes were torn from his body. It was Bob! I gave a little exclamation of joy and throttled the motor so that he might get up more easily.

From the cockpit I noticed that the skin of his legs was stripped in little ribbons as if someone had taken a razor blade and mathematically laid open and torn the skin at intervals—and he stopped to drag the rope ladder up and over the wing before he attempted to make the cockpit.

XVII

OFF OF WOMEN

A couple of times before I had sworn off women. A few things happened in a row to make me think I was right. I fell in love. That was the biggest one of all. It may be all right for some people, but it drives a stunt man flip-flop dizzy. And what I mean is this: If you're a bookkeeper you can write an "I love you" instead of a figure eight, but if you're a stunt man and just about to do a six-story jump and look up and see the moon you're liable to make a misstep.

I met Georgie Smith again, and it had the same effect as catnip on a one-year-old kitten. All I could do was think of calling on her, all I could see was her face when I started a stunt. She was working on one set with me when I was supposed to jump over a balcony and do a somersault to the water below. I got back and prepared for the leap, and just as I was about to clear the railing I saw her smiling countenance. Well, I smiled at the wrong time. I did just enough turn to land on my chin and push all my teeth through my upper lip.

And if that wasn't enough, I was doing a stunt for Fox the day following, in which I had to wire a half-size bed

to the top of an airplane and then have one of my pilots play around in the air with it—me being the goof who nightwalks and runs.

Well, I ran back and forth a few times, which is not easy on the top wing with nothing to hold on to. And when you strike a bump you are left in midair for a few seconds, hoping that the ship won't travel clear out from under you before you start coming down.

About the tenth time I ran and jumped over the bed I thought of Georgie, and I took the prettiest nose dive you ever heard of. Usually this means that you go digging daisies, but with my good luck and lack of sense it meant that I rolled right back on the pilot. I didn't stop to beg his pardon. Anyway, when I got to the cockpit I found that I had cut the left side of my nose almost through with the sharp edge of a piece of piano wire.

I was through with the women.

Moreover, the next day after this I tried to land on the top of one of the big stages at Fox studio and almost made it. But just when I was going to sit down I felt a funny ripping sound in back of me and instantly knew something was wrong. So I went back to the field. When I came down and examined the fuselage I found that there were two neat holes clear through the ship. Somebody had taken a shot at me!

Well, I went back to the studio and found that a woman with a .30-.30 had been popping at me because she thought I had been scaring her chickens too much. So I decided that I wouldn't be shot for any woman and I'd give up Georgie Smith.

But after all she was a nice girl. Beautiful to look at, and a perfectly innocent heart. Of course, she had been out with a couple of directors since I had seen her, but I knew that she had not so much as kissed them. There are a few nice girls in Hollywood, and I knew perfectly well that she was one of them. Everyone said so—even the directors. That convinced me.

No one can deliberately break engagements, especially with such a nice girl. It just wouldn't be right. So I didn't. I couldn't have if I'd wanted to—and I didn't want to.

So I went over to her house, and she and I got her father out of the kitchen (ordinarily called the Hollywood cellar) and we got "poppa" feeling very good. His health hadn't been exceptional for the last few years. He'd been mixed up in some new Middle Western politics. But he was feeling pretty good by the time he climbed the imaginary stairs to the living room, and when Georgie and I went out to talk on the porch swing "poppa" went out on the divan. Georgie is smart as well as good-looking, and I admire a woman of brains, looks, and purity. Everybody does. And they all agreed with me then.

When I went home that night I didn't care whether I stunted any more or not. With a girl like Georgie one would be content to live on love. I knew then that I'd drive a truck or a milk wagon for her, although I couldn't think of the milk wagon because that would keep me out all night, and think of that poor little innocent thing being alone all evening!

However, it was late that night and I had to get up early. I had to do a change from one airplane to the other

without a rope ladder. It didn't annoy me much because I had done it for fun more than once.

I was feeling perfectly normal when I took off my clothes, had my quick shower, and jumped into bed. And then a most unusual thing happened.

I know I had been asleep. But of a sudden I awoke and was sitting upright in bed. At first I couldn't imagine what it was all about, couldn't place myself. And then over the foot of the bed I saw something which made my muscles freeze. It was Sylvester! The Sylvester who had been in my class. He who had been killed flying formation. And he was looking at me with that same hardness, yet that unbelievable kindliness, which I had noticed as I last saw him. Every line in his face, including the wrinkled forehead and deeply creased smile lines, were there; those big pores in his cheeks, the peculiarly shaped chin. I knew that this could be no dream.

And he raised his arm in a warning and pointed the finger at me. I thought I heard a whisper, thought he gave me a warning for the stunt on the morrow. And then it was gone.

For a few minutes I lay there silently. Was or wasn't it a dream? I had a cigarette and thought some more. Well, anyway I decided one thing. I was through with Georgie Smith. This dream, if it was one, was probably on account of women. From now on I'd be a model for celibacy. The next morning I felt awful. Even a shower did me no good. As I never eat breakfast I couldn't eat any on that morning, which I knew to be a bad sign.

So I went to the field. We prepared for the stunt. That is, got a camera mounted on one ship and warmed up my two which were involved in the transfer. We took off. And I wasn't in the spirit. I got to thinking that if there was a heaven for me beyond, it would be filled with motion picture companies wanting changes from airplane to airplane, or crack-ups. It was all professional to me now. No thrill. No sensation. No elation.

I got out on the lower wing and ran out to the last strut. Then I climbed it and stood waiting on the top panel, just about at the cabane posts. I was braced—ready.

The other ships came pouting along. The experienced pilot was handling it well. Gradually he drew closer until I could just about reach the wing skid. It was directly above now and we were ready. The only tense moment in a change.

This one never came. At that moment we hit a terrific bump. The wing of the top ship dipped down and that of the lower plane up. And there I was, or wasn't I? I am not an accordion, but I did make a great bumper. Something hit me and I went down. I don't even remember if the two ships separated. I didn't care. Somebody pulled a shade over the sun and the light went out.

The next thing I remember was coming in to land. The top of the wing was slippery with blood, and I was caught in one of the cabane posts. I looked at the blood. It must be mine, but from where? It did not take long to find out. There was a neat hole in the back of my head.

It reminded me of the hole a dentist leaves when he pulls out a molar. The illusion struck me as funny and I laughed. The more I thought of it the funnier it got, and I laughed and laughed and laughed. I was still laughing when they took me to a hospital.

After that I thought about Sylvester.

XVIII

THAT THE FILMS MAY CARRY ON

I MADE five hundred dollars out of politics. Bill Camp came out to the aviation field and said that I had never given him a thrill in the air. I admitted that possibility, because I'm through thrilling unless it's called for in my business. But he kept insisting that I couldn't, so I asked him if he had anything to back his judgment with. He drew out five one-hundred-dollar bills, and then of course I couldn't back out.

I put up a check that wasn't any good and got into one of my ships. We got up to five hundred feet and I looked over my spot. I'd picked it to try sometime, anyway. Two oil derricks about a hundred feet apart had a steel cable connecting them. This cable at its lowest sagging point was a good thirty-five feet from the ground.

I banked into the wind and went into a dive. When a couple of hundred feet from the ground Camp looked back but could not see me. The windshield covered me perfectly. At a hundred he was tugging at the controls. Later he said he thought that I had fainted.

Then I started to ease out, swooping under the wires and again zooming skyward. Immediately I turned to the field. We had been in the air just about five minutes, and

there was no question of a thrill. Not since then has he asked for one.

I gathered Bob Rose and Dick Curwood that night and we went over to see Georgie Smith. I don't think that Mr. Smith was so friendly, and he wouldn't offer to go to the kitchen. But the little girl more than made up for it. She ordered a couple of friends for Bob and Dick and the three couples of us had a very pleasant evening. One of those few that stunt men have.

We danced until about two-thirty, when I decided that it was necessary to get some sleep, as I was to go on location with the Tom Mix Company the next day with two ships I had purchased for a picture called *The Forest Ranger*.

Two ships necessarily mean two pilots, and so I persuaded Rogers Airport to let Bud Creeth go in one.

We started off in old crates, one of which I was to crash intentionally in the picture. Before we got halfway Bud had a forced landing and almost crashed into a tree, landing in an emergency field, and because I tried to land I barely escaped a similar accident. Later in the afternoon my motor went dead and I had to pick a tough spot, and Bud almost cracked up trying to follow my example. Those were the great days of flying. It took us a day and a half to make four hundred miles.

We landed at an improvised field at Felton, from which we decided to operate. It was a low-lying plateau surrounded on all sides by mountains. Landing and taking off were not easy. It was necessary for us to spiral three or four times to get in and out.

Somehow the roar of motors seemed out of place in this country. As the detonations of the cylinders echoed and reëchoed from the side of the mountains it seemed almost as if it was their last angry protest against the intrusion of man.

And the giant redwoods, many of which towered two hundred feet into the air, seemed to watch this new development with patience only acquired by thousands of years of existence.

But two days later we began work on the picture and for me it was just another of those things—flying, stunting, crashing.

My first stunt was a crash into the side of a barn. It was not a difficult feat, except that the building was but a foot wider than my ship. That allowed me just six inches on either side of the wing. And if the entire ship did not smash through the barn side and disappear into the interior the shot, ship, and all would be a total loss.

Have you ever tried to concentrate on two objects at the same time? The eyes simply won't do it. At least mine won't. It was therefore impossible for me to watch both wings simultaneously. For just a little bit I was rather dubious. A fair rate of speed was required, yet just six inches to miss.

At first I thought I would judge by watching one wing alone. The other would take care of itself. Then another idea came to me. I had the construction department build a window directly in the centre of the building. This window contained the usual four divisions.

I admit that it was with a little misgiving that I taxied

back some hundreds of feet from the barn and prepared to do the crash. I had to hit sufficiently hard to break through, yet if I threw myself and the ship in with too much power, I'd hit the rear end of the structure so hard that I might cause the rear supports to give away, in which case the entire building might collapse.

I arose in the seat and took one last look at the window, then, fastening the safety belt around me, I gave the ship the gun and I was off. I felt the wheels leave the ground, which meant that my speed was sufficient to give me good control.

How I should have liked to look at the edges of the wings! I wanted to glance at the corners of the barn, to see if I was right, but instead I kept my eyes glued to the crossbars of the window. And did that window loom up suddenly? From an inconspicuous object some distance away it was suddenly projected directly in front of the propeller.

The next second the knifelike edges cut into the thin wood and with a crash I was inside the barn. Before I knew it. Before I had time to shut off the ignition or the gas.

A second crash! I had hit the rear of the barn. But instead of the supports giving, the motor itself moved. The mount supporting it gave like paper and the OX5 was pushed up into the gas tank.

The stunt was a success. The entire ship was inside the barn. I had not so much as touched either wing as I crashed in, and as far as the little damage to the ship was concerned—that was expected.

With this one stunt under the belt I felt much better about finishing the rest of the stunts satisfactorily, and perhaps it was this confidence which carried the old Jennies over the hazardous territory safely the next few weeks.

Most of our work was at Bonny Doon, a section of particularly wild country in the altitudes. Here the redwoods were like huge church spires, they were so tall and so straight.

Sometimes as I would be flying, overloaded to the gills with camera equipment and a camera man, I got a thrill out of thinking what would become of the entire cargo if the motor should quit.

Norman Devoe, who was the Akeley camera man on the troupe, was detailed with me to get some thrill diving shots of the little group of buildings hidden so completely away in this wilderness. These buildings were constructed on a small plateau, surrounded on three sides by trees and on the fourth by a cliff that arose almost perpendicularly to a height of about a thousand feet. It was our duty to dive over the cliff and photograph the plateau and the set.

I don't think that Norman knew exactly the danger which was involved in those flights, but I do think if he had known he'd have acted just as he did. He had never photographed from an airplane before and as a matter of fact had never been up until we started out on this hazardous trip.

But I was fully aware of the possibilities should motor trouble overtake us and so was extremely careful about inspection of the motor before each trip. I would take out

the spark plugs and clean them thoroughly, as I did the carburetor jets and the magneto points. All gas lines were checked, and the motor was run almost five minutes before each take-off.

But it looked as though my precautions were all wasted. There remained but one more flight, one more series of dives at the clearing. I think we were both glad, and so on our last take-off we were filled with a pep which we had not felt before.

The old motor seemed to know it too and, like motors, seemed to gather the enthusiasm of the passengers. It picked up the JN-4 and climbed steadily toward our goal on top of the tree-covered mountains. Some minutes later we were up about fifty-five hundred. And then I pushed the nose of the ship down and headed for the cliff. We were now nearing position to make the dive. Devoe was standing up in the back seat, his hand on the unwieldy stick of the Akeley camera. Such a position made the ship slightly tail-heavy, but it could not be helped. He had to stand to grind. And the position was not one of great comfort to him. It meant that he had to fight the full force of the wind. No belt could be used, so the position was not exactly safe in a dive. The only safeguard he could use was rather a meagre one. He tied a piece of sash cord around his waist and to a longeron in the fuselage.

We dived. It was exceptionally steep and brought water from the overflow pipe of the radiator and gasoline from the air vent in the gas tank. Down the side of the cliff some eight hundred feet I continued, looking back

just long enough to see that Devoe was O. K. He was. Braced against his camera he was grinding away.

I drew up and made a quick climbing turn, and then I turned to get his reaction. He was smiling, nodding his approval enthusiastically. I thought that this showed considerable nerve, considering that this was but his third flight, and I nodded back.

During the climb upward and back into position for another dive we had a chance to wipe our goggles for the next and final thrill. It did not take long to get into position. And I levelled out about half a mile back of the cliff. I think I breathed a sigh of relief with the thought that this was to be the last of our really hazardous work.

Then I caught sight of Bud Creeth in another ship, flying about a mile away from us, and remembered that he too was engaged in some dangerous work with the rest of the troupe. It rather cheered me to see him, to know that he too was going strong. But as we neared our objective I lost him and gave over complete thought to our last stunt.

We were now but a few feet above the tops of the redwoods, and only about five hundred feet from the cliff. A few seconds and we'd be in it again. Now we were but two hundred feet from it. Devoe was set. I was leaning forward ready to shove the stick and put us into a real fast one.

Then without the slightest warning the motor missed. Just once. But my heart leaped up in count immediately. Just a few feet over the trees. No place to land. If it should

quit it would be a crash and a bad one! I attempted to lift the nose slightly to get more air between me and those redwoods. It missed again! I was now but a hundred feet or so from the edge of the cliff. What a terrific place for motor trouble. It would be too bad for both Devoe and myself should it die altogether.

But motors are no respecters of time, places, or persons. With one final wheeze and a cough it just ceased to turn over, and there we were.

I glanced hurriedly about, but unfortunately my observations had been correct. There was no spot that wasn't filled with redwoods, huge rocks, and twining undergrowth. In a last desperate chance I stalled upwards, and it gave me time to make a decision. But one thing to do. I could just about make the edge of the cliff. And then if I could but clear it all of the way down I might be able to crash in the little plateau.

It would be a bad one, for I'd have to side-slip to get in, and riding in the "golden chair" (or the front seat) as we called it, made it look rather doubtful for me. It looked as though both of us were due for a rest, either temporary or permanent.

I nosed over and just missed the rocks at the edge. It was then that I got a chance to take a quick glance backward. Devoe was still standing up cranking.

"Sit down!" I hollered, and turned back to put the ship into a slip. It was not easy with an excess load, and I knew that it would be no simple matter to keep it in one for the entire distance. Moreover, with him standing, and no motor, the thing became more and more tail-heavy.

Dead bird!

After I was in the slip I glanced back again. He was still grinding! Surely he knew we were in serious trouble.

"Sit down," I commanded, "we're going to crash!"

Then I got exceedingly busy keeping the thing in what I figured to be the only manœuvre that would give us a chance.

A hundred feet from the ground I turned to see if he was protecting himself, and almost passed out when I saw him still standing by his guns, grinding away. That was the last that I thought I'd ever see him. A side-slip from a thousand feet into the ground. Me in the front. A camera man standing up in back. I just kissed us both good-bye.

Well, we hit. For a few seconds struts and motor parts, wing panels and pieces of propeller flew around so fast and raised so much dust that I didn't know exactly what was happening. As a matter of fact I was temporarily out.

Then, as the dust cleared from the spot and from my brain, I waved part of the wreckage from around me and found a hole. I crawled out, and immediately hurried to the back seat. But there wasn't any. It had telescoped completely together. It was so crushed and broken that nobody could be alive. There wouldn't have been room in it for another stick. And Devoe must be crushed to death.

I turned away with a sickening feeling in my stomach. The first person I had ever killed in an airplane—and after all of these years of stunting.

Then I glanced at the wreck of the ship. I had never seen anything so demolished. The motor had dug a hole about four feet in diameter and about half of that in depth. It had hit so hard that it had bounced back again.

Gasoline was pouring from everything. Not one thing was unbroken. Even the wings were wrenched and torn from the body.

One of them was some twenty feet from the rest of the ship. And when I looked at it I gasped. My mouth must have opened pretty wide, but I couldn't say a word. There was Devoe! Sitting on the top of that wing, the handle of the Akeley camera still in his hand.

When I saw him he was rather in a daze, and kept looking over the broken handle with sort of simple perplexity. I wasn't much better; my head was bleeding slightly from a broken vein. And I really thought we needed an introduction to each other because we were as black as darkest Africa, from oil and dirt of the crash.

Benny Southland, our mechanic, came running to us, and then only did we fully come to our senses.

Five minutes later we were joking about our escape, and I congratulated Devoe upon getting the first actual air shot of a crack-up, which was really quite remarkable. In the picture you could see the ship heading for the ground. You could see the ground approaching and also the shadow of the ship and the ship meeting the ground. Then dust and a few parts starting to scatter around and about.

I certainly give credit to that camera man. One of his few times up, and he deliberately ground against my advice. It is strange, but if he had followed my instructions he'd have been killed, for he'd have been ground to bits in the back seat. By standing, the impact had thrown him clear. But I'd like to have been on the side lines and

watched him as he flew out and came to the end of his safety rope. They say he turned about four complete turns, and landed sitting!

A week or so later we left the location, for which I was very glad. In the first place I wanted to see Georgie Smith again, though I knew that she'd be true to me even if I were away a year instead of a few weeks.

My first surprise in getting back to Hollywood was to find that Leo Nomis had broken a collar bone during the making of *Manslaughter*.

Leo was one of the most daring of stunt men. For years he took every chance that was offered. Wrecking automobiles and stunts on motorcycles were his pet pastimes, though he was as good a pilot as ever flew a ship.

In the stunt in which he was injured he deliberately jumped a motorcycle from a small take-off in the road over the top of an automobile. Both were making tremendous speed and when Leo hit the take-off it hurtled him and the cycle high into the air—and they successfully passed over the automobile at right angles. But when they hit the pavement Leo slid and bumped with such force as to tear plenty of skin from his body as well as fracture the broken collar bone. However, everybody considered him lucky to escape alive. And incidentally it is one stunt which will live a long time in the history of thrill-making.

And yet we cannot all escape so fortunately. Someone has to pay for the luck of others. Apparently science has no relationship to the law of averages.

Shortly after Leo Nomis did this stunt for *Manslaughter* Dick Curwood was engaged for some rope-ladder work

for an independent producer. Dick should never have gone back into the aviation angle after he broke his back on that stunt for Fox. But who can persuade a man that he is through in a profession? Not even the injuries which most of us acquire cure us. We go back to the well once too often.

For this stunt Dick picked one of the shrewdest pilots on the West Coast—Frank Tomick—and they took off for the work. Dick had put on weight, which made it difficult to handle him on the wings; but this work was directly below the fuselage, so Frank found little difficulty.

At a signal the stunt man climbed from the seat and worked his way slowly to the leading edge of the ship. He smiled back at the pilot as he let his legs down and felt for the ladder. Then his head and finally his hands disappeared under the wing and Frank Tomick got into position to do his work.

But it was a peculiar feeling that Tomick had. He did not feel the jerks which the pilot usually feels as the stunt man goes down the ladder or changes position. He could not feel the weight of Dick's body, being blasted in the propeller stream. Moreover, when he was manœuvring there was no evidence that Dick was doing a thing on the ladder.

After ten minutes Frank was worried. Something must have happened. He had never felt Dick on that ladder once. Frank sensed that a tragedy had happened. He banked the ship sharply and, sure enough, the ladder was empty. There was no Dick at the end of it. It ominously

floated, whipped in the wind, mute evidence that Dick had joined that ever-growing Squadron of Death.

It seemed impossible to Frank. The two had done many stunts together, and this was a very simple piece of rope-climbing. Could he have gotten discouraged? But no—impossible! Frank landed with the rope ladder dangling, and again and again he searched the bottom of the ship—but there was no doubt. Dick had failed to come back this time.

Personally I think his broken back gave away at a crucial moment and he tumbled into space, just another of our workers to pass into the Great Beyond.

Hours later they found his body in the mountains, crushed and broken. The horrible details had better be left unsaid. Only those whose imagination runs to the highest peaks can conjure the shape of his head—and his body.

Thus another of my dear friends passed out, and I rapidly came to another conclusion for my own good. I'd never so long as I stunted in pictures make a great friend out of any one of my companions. It hurt too much when they were killed. It affected me for too many days and weeks afterward.

XIX

SPECULATORS IN DARE-DEVILTRY

The death of Curwood seemed to start things all over in a bad way. B. H. Delay lost his wings at twenty-five hundred and crashed into the ground. H. C. Lippiatt, an experienced pilot who saw the accident, said that it looked as if he might escape because the right wing folded back in a sort of V and the ship seemed to come down rather slowly. But it was only deception due to their height. As they neared the earth their real speed was apparent and of course they were ground into bits.

Following this Hoff took off, flew over Venice, California, and suddenly went into a dive. We all thought that his stick came loose, leaving him without controls. Regardless of the cause he never came out but plunged right through the heavy planking and pylons of the pier. It takes some force to drive an entire machine, motor, fuselage, and pilots through a structure of such strength.

And all during this period I was exceptionally busy. I had to do a drop from one airplane to another for Larry Semon. Not an easy change, hanging by your knees from an unstable rope ladder and waiting until the other plane gets below. In the first place, I don't believe that anybody's judgment is as good when they are hanging head down,

because the head throbs with blood and the eyes bulge. Then, too, it is impossible to wear goggles or helmet, and so the eyes are doubly subjected to punishment. The hair is whipped and beaten until you can't comb it for days after. Even your clothing suffers. During one picture eleven shirts were torn from my back in doing wing tricks.

In another picture I was supposed to be dreaming, and during the course of the nightmare I was to believe that I was walking the wings of a ship. In order to get the effect I had actually to walk wings in a pair of pajamas. So I dressed in my one and only pair of silk pajamas and we took off for the stunt. It was a cold day, and in nothing but pajamas I felt just about as comfortable as a moulting ostrich would among the icebergs.

Finally we reached the proper altitude and Arthur Goebel, who was flying me, gave the sign that it was all right to climb out. I looked over at the other ship. It was in position, so in my bare feet I clambered out to the last strut and then scaled the wires to the top wing.

And here my troubles began. First a button tore from the shirt of the pajamas. Of course that let in plenty of air, so I had to fold my arms to keep the thing from blowing completely off me. Then one of the legs split and I knew that silk pajamas were all wet for walking wings. I reached down to try to cover up the bare leg and the shirt blew in two—right down the back. Well, I want to tell you that it took less than two minutes for the wind to completely undress me. A fine situation to be in! Directly above a city of a million and a half, without a stitch of clothing.

The pilots were laughing, so was the camera man, but I couldn't and still can't see so much humor in the situation. Shivering and disgusted—and no way to get down decently. I got back into the seat and argued with Art, and I can hear him laugh yet!

Well, he finally landed us at another field and he kindly let me use his leather jacket, and when we came to our own field we taxied right into the hangar.

Following this Maurice Murphy, who looped an airplane all of the way from San Francisco to Los Angeles, and I put on a fight on the wing of an airplane. Not difficult, but in order to make it effective and thrilling it was necessary for us to resort to falls and positions which the slightest error in judgment might convert into more than a mere farce fight.

On the same day in which we finished this fight I was engaged by William Fox Studios to do a fall from a twenty-five-foot parallel to the ground. It was not a jump, just a running dive, landing on my chest and hands twenty-five feet below.

Now twenty-five feet does not seem like much of a fall, but when the full force has to be taken by the lungs, ribs, and hands it really becomes quite a feat. I did not feel particularly like doing it because I had already had enough stunts for one day, but as long as I had accepted I could do nothing else.

After reporting to the assistant I went to a dressing room, where I hastily slipped into the clothes provided for the double, and came back ready and willing to get it over with.

I knew that none of those watching realized how hard I had worked that day, and I knew that it was wrong to do these things with weak, tired muscles. I had none of the vitality which is the safeguard of a stunt man. It was all I could do to force a smile. Cameras were set up on the parallel and on the ground. They were going to shoot it from both angles.

Finally the director climbed up to the stand and casually sat in his chair. Around him were his assistants and some of the usual crowd of his "yes" men.

Without a word to me he turned to the camera man and gave him the word to grind. Then he bellowed through his megaphone: "All right, get set—jump!"

I did. Clearing the railing, I flattened out, making sure that my feet were quite some distance higher than my chest, and hit with a thud that almost knocked the wind out of me. I knew that it was done right. It should have been perfect. There should have been no retake. Therefore I was much surprised to find that I was required to do it again and again.

Each time I did it the stunt became harder. I seemed to hit the ground with greater force, or was not able to break the fall as much as I had before. I was becoming dizzy. Five times I had done it now. And I wondered just why the director and the staff laughed each time I hurtled myself over the railing to the ground below.

At that I had no kick coming. I was to get thirty-five dollars a fall—and a retake was the same price as the first jump. But there is a limit to all things. At the end of the sixth jump I was so sore that I could not get up imme-

diately. My ribs and lungs were aching terrifically, yet I did not hear the welcoming O. K. Again—would I have to do it? If they did not get what they wanted soon, I'd be breaking bones.

But while I lay there Bob Rose came over to me and whispered: "Dick—don't do it any more! The director is having you repeat it for his pleasure. Better stop before you get internal injuries."

As I got up I looked them over. So this again was the attitude of those for whom we made thrills! As far as they were concerned, we were just a nonentity. A bunch of flesh thrown together to furnish necessary footage for pictures—and when we were worn out, or killed, they could always find more fools to take our places.

Of course the real producers value us, and always will. We are a necessary part of making pictures. They are wise in consulting those of us who have proved by years of the work that we can usually walk out of any stunt we contract for. But why don't they take those few good stunt men and let them make enough money to retire gracefully after a few years? The stars get their thousands of dollars a week. Some directors get more than the stars. Assistant directors range from one hundred to five hundred a week. Yet the poor devil who does the thrills is lucky to be held on longer than a few days.

In one stunt which I did for a big company I was engaged to deliberately crash an airplane. I had a verbal contract with the highest men in the studio—the price was to be five hundred. And this price was just about half what I figured the thing was worth.

I did the crash to their satisfaction, and when I went to collect my check it was for three hundred dollars. Well I knew that the courts of justice were no good place for a case of Stunt Man *vs.* Studio. In the first place I'd lose the suit and in the second I'd be barred from the lot.

Once before I had been engaged to do a stunt and had not been paid my full price. Natural indignation at the tyranny and lack of justice made me demand my rights. Eventually I got them, but I did not work on that lot again for six months.

Not all producers are like this. The usual big producer not only lives up to his word, but if you are hurt the company gives you a bonus. Perhaps no company in motion pictures is more generously inclined in this way than Famous-Player-Lasky. When I was severely injured in making one of their pictures they voluntarily put me on half salary for six months.

But not many are really so fortunate. It has been my fortune to make more money for my stunts and to receive better treatment than the usual stunt man. Perhaps I pride myself too much when I say that they may like me a little bit.

Still it cannot change the attitude, which eventually eats into your heart. Sooner or later the work will get you, too. No one can live indefinitely doing hazards which hold so great an element of danger. That horde of faces beyond is not much different from those here. Care lines show early, and scars on the body and the brain multiply with great rapidity.

How different my attitude these last few years from

that of the fresh youngster about nine years ago. My body is still in perfect physical shape, but my ambition to get any place in pictures is gone. "Once a stunt man always a stunt man." I heard it from the beginning—and scoffed at the idea. Surely one who was good in his own professional line had a chance to rise in any branch of the profession. But no! They were right. A stunt man, race driver, flier, or crash engineer (as I have been called the last few years) has not one chance of ever reaching solid success.

It is because the producers don't believe in him. If he had brains he wouldn't be doing it. If he stays with it long enough he'll become "cracked." And when he breaks he'll kill himself by accident or by design. It's a torture, a misery, for a thinking man to kid himself from one year to another—to find in the end that the door *is* absolutely closed.

Yet whose fault is it? Producers want nobody to stunt for them who wants to do anything but stunt. That's settled. Men who go into it, then, should not expect advancement, and for the most part they do not. Just occasionally one pops in, like myself, who thinks that he can break time-honored precedent—and they have to take their bumps the same as the others.

By this time I had absorbed the hopelessness of my clan somewhat. I got to live life as the others did—from day to day, not thinking of to-morrow, perhaps not daring to. All they and I knew was that to-day we were living, and after all it is the only day that counts in the lives of us who gamble.

We are gamblers! The greatest speculators in the world. Some people are fortunate enough to be able to gamble with money—others in business prospects. But not having been willed money or valuables to gamble with, we do it with our lives. It really is a bet—every time we take a stunt we bet so much money against a life that we'll pull through unhurt. Naturally you can't win every bet.

My own stunts I imagine I have reduced to a point beyond gamble, but have I? A few more crack-ups—one jump too many—and I may be just as far wrong as anyone.

Then why do it? Why not give it up? Questions by hundreds pour in in letters—are asked by our friends and even our enemies. Why? That depends on the person. Dick Curwood did one too many that his children might have an education; Burgess, so he might some day be a power in aviation. Bob Rose wants to quit but can't—he needs an operation. Most of us are in it for the money one way or another. Circumstances force us there and the rut is too deep for us to jump out. We get dependent. We forget how to do anything else. And after a while most of us lose any sense of good business—if we ever had any.

With me it is partially the love of the game that keeps me with it. I don't want to leave it. It is the struggle that I like. Why should I give up crashing airplanes and automobiles, give up dives and jumps, when I take keen satisfaction in accomplishing the unusual? Perhaps I am destructive. I like to hear the crash and bang of an airplane breaking up around me. I really enjoy the sensation as an automobile hits and rolls down a cliff. I keenly

feel the thrill as my body falls from a height. Surely it is all destructive—but at least I have turned my destructive inclinations to a constructive channel. Criminals who are destructive are small, narrow. They harm others. With us we can hurt no one but ourselves.

Paul Malvern slipped at the top of a mast and fell almost a hundred feet into the water, lighting flat on his side. It was a terrific blow—knocked him unconscious—yet he laughed when he came to.

Gene Perkins was doubling in one of William Desmond's serials at the U. He was on top of a corrugated iron roof—the eaves of which were about forty feet from the ground. Gene was to roll down the roof and then fall the forty feet to a mattress imbedded below the surface of the ground. He expected a hard fall, but not as hard as he took. Just as he made the last roll his coat caught momentarily in the eaves—just enough to keep him from hitting the mattress. And he fell the forty feet to solid earth, hitting squarely on his head.

Everybody thought that he was killed. Quickly he was loaded into the nearest car and rushed to a hospital. When about halfway there he regained consciousness and his first words were: "Give me a cigarette!" Someone handed him one and he sat up.

"Where do you think you're taking me?" he asked, apparently puzzled at his presence in the car.

"To the hospital, of course—you're hurt," answered the assistant director.

"Hospital hell!—just because I missed. Now let's go back and do it right." And he did.

For this kind of work Gene was drawing about seventy-five dollars a week, though I think toward the last of his contract his salary was raised. And Gene was an all-around man. He did exceedingly high fire and net dives, changed from airplane to airplane—anything required of a good stunt man.

So you will find that although compensation plays an important part in the calculations of a stunt man it is not purely for money that he sticks to the most dangerous game in the world. And you will find that the attitudes of the majority of us are very similar. Perkins and Malvern are not much different from Duke Green, Dick Curwood, Harvey Perry, myself, or any of the others. A broken bone or a hard bump is expected as surely as a slump in the stock market.

Only the stock market is not so much of a gamble. Sometimes the studio casting office will call us and tell us to report at once to a certain director. Upon arriving and conferring with him we find that he wants a high dive or a fight and fall from a cliff. But he has not had time to select the location. Therefore he cannot actually tell us of the danger involved in doing the stunt. Or maybe he has seen the cliff. He knows the effect he is after—and he may try to describe this effect to the stunt man. But he has failed to take in surrounding conditions—the depth of the water below; overhanging rocks which we must jump to clear; adverse wind conditions. Perhaps, even, the location is hundreds of miles away. Nobody has ever been there. A stunt man is taken along to perform the thrills

and neither he nor the studio has any idea what may be required of him before he gets back.

The majority of stunt men never rise to above one hundred and fifty dollars per week—and they have to be plenty lucky to get that. Such salary is not paid the best of them for a long time. There is no such thing for this kind of animal. He is lucky to draw such money by the picture, for it is only then that he can actually say that he earns anything without literally paying for it with his body. Usually with him it has narrowed down to this: "If I don't stunt, if I don't risk my life, I don't earn a dime."

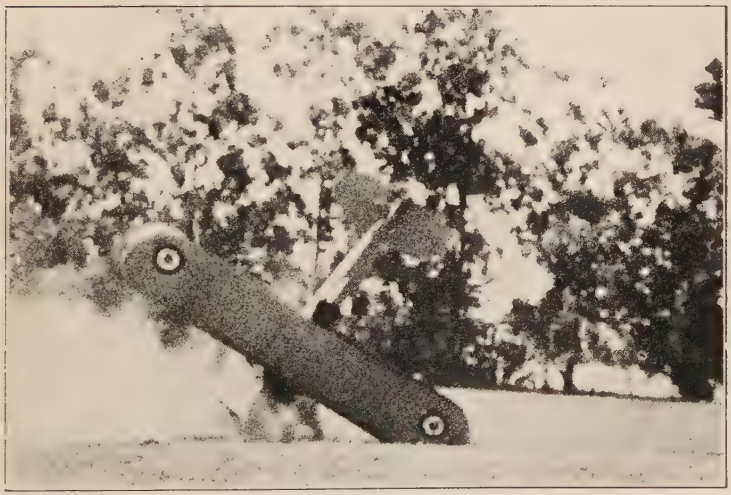
Bob Rose got a hundred and forty dollars a week with Ruth Roland serials for the last two this star made. And I want to say that Bob earned every cent. The stunts that he was required to do were numerous and at the same time exceptionally difficult.

One in particular involved considerable danger. An old-fashioned stagecoach, drawn by six horses, was to run away on a high clifflike road. The location selected was one of the many winding, twisting mountain roads on the coast range. To make six horses and the coach turn these hazardous bends required supreme skill.

But Bob was used to such chances. He figured everything mathematically as usual, first walking the entire course and stopping at every bad bend. At one in particular he paused exceptionally long. Should the horses and carriage accidentally go over this one there would be a sheer drop of almost a thousand feet.

The horses were hitched in pairs. And Bob sat on the driver's seat high above with the three pairs of reins in

Fulfilling mathematical specifications.



Crashing to order.

his hands. Then the cameras were placed along the different points of the route and everything was set.

With a crack of the whip they were off. And I mean off. Evidently the horses had not been exercised for some time. They were r'aring to go. Soon they actually were running away, and it was with great difficulty that Bob could control them at all. Down steep grades, around corners at dizzying speed, scraping and knocking the cliffs on both sides. Several times a wheel skidded over the side, and it looked as if Bob and the coach would be thrown for a loss. But he stuck. It was perhaps his only chance.

It is ever the little things which ruin our calculations in life. And so it was with Bob then. A bolt came loose, fell out of the whippletree, and the tongue of the crazy contraption dropped in between the six horses.

Bob saw it instantly—and knew just what it meant. Any minute one of the leading horses might trip on it, and then there would be a terrible mess of wheels, carriage, horses, and man.

Without a moment's hesitation he climbed from the seat, down onto the loose whippletree, then directly in between the horses to a point almost at the end of the tongue. If his luck could but last a few more minutes he would be able to reach and remedy the difficulty.

The horses were already in a frenzy. They were actually running away now. For nothing knows so well as a horse when something has gone wrong. They were in a lather of white sweat as they raced madly around the steep banks.

Bob was busy. He paid no attention to the increasing speed of the horses. He couldn't. His work of the moment

was to repair the break. He knew that his life was in jeopardy. That if one of them tripped it would surely almost be over for him. Six mad horses down and kicking would make it almost impossible for a man to escape.

He was just at a point of success when, with a lunge, the front right horse caught in his harness and plunged to the ground. Then things happened. Bob realized that it was too late to help the oncoming mess. He tried to leap from in between, before the others piled on top of him, and he almost succeeded. Almost, but not quite. The other five horses went down so quickly that it was impossible for him to act. And into this jumble of horses and man piled the coach.

The horses were frenzied, wild. They were screeching and kicking in the harness, and under it all somewhere was a man.

The entire troupe came to the rescue, although everybody knew that it was too late for the dare-devil that was beneath it all. Some were as excited as the horses, some who were used to accidents were cool.

The stagecoach was eventually cut free and then in short order the two horses on top were released and taken away. But the last four were difficult to untangle. Even with the aid of knives and hatchets it took almost five minutes to get them parted.

Now Bob could be seen, lying under the neck and forelegs of the first horse to go down. His arms were clasped tightly around the hoofs, his head buried on the horse's chest. Of course everyone thought he was dead. That was the position in which he had been thrown, for the horse

was still kicking violently. Still it was a peculiar thing. Those back feet were not touching him at all and he had the front ones helpless.

A few seconds and they pulled Bob out feet first, but they had to break his hold. Without question someone grabbed his feet, someone else his shoulders. Quick emergency treatment was extremely important. Then for the first time he instead of the horses did the kicking.

"Say, listen! Where the hell do I get off? Let go! Don't you think I'm old enough to walk?"

They dropped him, and he arose to his feet.

"Dammit!" he said in a surly voice, "you'd think someone was hurt, wouldn't you?"—and he got into a studio car and went to his dressing room. Another day of thrills finished.

XX

STARS AND DOUBLES AND AN ARABIAN HORSE

A MECHANIC at Clover Field, Ralph, took one of my ships up and crashed it into an army plane. Both my mechanic and his girl were instantly killed—the stick going clear through his stomach. The service men fared better, though it cut the forehead of one of the officers open and laid his entire face, including his nose and lips, right down on his chest. It was one of those things that could have been avoided because the boy did not have permission to go up. He had soloed but a few times, and that without knowledge or permission from anyone.

When the two ships collided, due to carelessness of the air rules, while coming in to make a landing, Ralph did a complete loop and landed at the bottom of it.

I was not there. At the time I had two airplanes on a sky backing at Fox and was superintending the taking of some fake shots for a comedy drama. Of course I went immediately to the scene of the accident, so that I could get a full report of the details. But when I got there officials of the field had cleaned up the mess so neatly that I went back to my work almost immediately.

When I got back to the studio I hurried to the set. At

first nobody noticed my presence, and I joined a group who were listening to someone tell an interesting story. People of the troupe were crowded all about the speaker, so naturally I elbowed a little nearer. A man who claimed to be a stunt man was narrating some of his harrowing experiences. He was graphically describing how he had made a change from an airplane to an automobile. It was a very difficult change, from the wing skid to the back seat without the use of a rope ladder. He told of the difficulty they had in getting into position, and how when he finally let go he hit the bare boards of the back seat so hard that it knocked him out. But it was a great change—everyone expected it to be the thrill of the season.

So when they went into the projection room to see it everybody was naturally curious. All waited impatiently while the rest of the "dailies" were being flashed on, and as one shot after another appeared and no "change," the troupe became impatient. Then came the shot (the last one on the reel), and instead of the beautiful change they all expected to see, there was nothing but a plain, blank piece of film.

The camera man had forgotten to open his iris!

The stunt man who was telling the story said he almost fainted as he saw that useless piece of film. So did I as I heard him tell it. The story was correct all right. There was only one little mistake—I was the one who had made the drop!

Some stunt men are like that, but only those who never accomplish anything. The Orpheum circuit booked two who had never been in a big motion-picture studio on the

West coast, as the greatest "doubles" motion pictures ever had. Several of us went down in a body to listen to their act, and of all the weird tales you ever heard, the strangest were from those two self-made stunt men.

But people of that kind are not uncommon. I have heard stars sit around right here in Hollywood and tell some great fish stories: how they escaped in this crack-up, how they made a certain change from airplane to airplane, or how athletic they had to be to perform the dangerous leaps and dives required daily from them.

One in particular used to delight in telling of a narrow escape he had in making a fire dive from a burning building, and he would turn to me for verification. I got to be quite a proficient liar backing him up.

Well, I guess it's expected of us. When we sign a contract we have to do more than earn our money by risking our health. It's better that we tell how brave some of our stars are; otherwise we couldn't work for them.

Which reminds me—did you ever hear of a double being hurt or killed? The publicity attendant on such deaths is usually confined to the official announcements. But if a star gets a scratch of the toe, or chews a finger nail too close, the publicity department immediately has the star in the Hollywood Hospital in serious condition.

Female stars are particularly prone to the dramatic. If they can't advertise more than a beautiful face it's because of some late accident to the lower limbs. One in particular who was known as a daring girl on the screen made a tour of the Orpheum circuit and very dramatically told of the great perils she went through to give the public

thrills: how much punishment she subjected herself to to produce dramatic moments, how she loved to do it.

"Just for you, my dear public," I can still hear the chant, "and I hope when you see my pictures you will realize that I, at least, take these extraordinary chances that you may have your thrills." Then she showed flashes of the various stunts she had done for ten or fifteen years. Ye gods! Every one of them was the work of her stunt man, who is down and out and broke at present.

And I can still hear her holler, "Mama! Mama! Mama! Oh! I'm so afraid! Mama!" when they had her tied by about six ropes and a couple of belts as she hung over a ten-foot cliff.

Of course I do not mean that some stars do not do their stuff. Tom Mix does and always has done most of his work. So also does Hoot Gibson, who is one of the best horsemen in the world. Ken Maynard and Buck Jones all do their own risks with horses. Buddy Rogers and Dick Arlen both flew many hours with a pilot in *Wings*.

But the majority do not take their own risks nor do they pretend to. It would be folly for them, as their salary is such that they must think twice before trying anything hazardous. Then, too, the studio could not afford to have these valuable players injured, thus tying up an entire production. This would cause a great loss both in time and in money.

The stunt man's attitude toward the stars is mostly a passive one. He is the one man in the studio who must be a good listener, and incidentally one of the few on the set who cannot get temperamental. After a stunt he holds his

exact position, so that the star may climb into his place and continue with close-ups in order that the public will not notice the break in the film at all.

After I had done one very spectacular crack-up I held the position in which I ended until the star was ready to take my place. Then, as I crawled out of the wreckage and he crawled in, he said one of the finest things a stunt man could hear from a featured player. Turning to me after he was properly placed he said, "You know, Dick, it was a great crack-up, and to think I have to take the credit for it doesn't seem quite right, does it?" Naturally you'd expect that from Buddy Rogers.

I smiled and thanked him. He was one of the very few who ever thought of the man who helped in a small way to make thrilling pictures thrilling.

All in all it is a peculiar position. The stars think that a stunt man is just a little above an extra. The producers think he is a little below a moron. The public has never heard of him. It thinks that all thrills are faked or double-printed.

And the stunt man. What does he think? He scorns the actor who is really afraid. This type of person he naturally avoids, whether the actor be a success or just a star. The producer comes in for his share of hot-house adjectives, but these usually do not reach the ears of these high and mighty personages.

Perhaps the reason for part of the natural antipathy existing between the stunt man and the producer is because of the professional go-between, a troupe business

Master of crashing chaos.

manager. This man usually blames the main office when he can find no other excuse for cutting the price of a stunt, or when he refuses to give the man his price. How often have I heard these grave robbers say, "The budget won't stand another dime. It's all we can afford to pay." Yet the main office has not the slightest idea what it's all about—this bartering of pennies for thrills. And I've seen these same business managers spend thousands where it didn't count and never could show in a picture. Sometimes they take an entire troupe on a location where a double, a couple of camera men, and an assistant director would suffice.

Peculiarly, with all of these drawbacks a stunt man is popular. There are those who admire his attitude toward life, who know the struggle he is up against and encourage and assist him. After he does a stunt he is more or less the idol of the troupe. It is fickle praise, because after all this is a fickle profession. The greatest stars of to-day may be forgotten to-morrow.

But I believe every star and every producer has seen some stunt man do some stunt which has impressed itself indelibly on his mind. I do not believe that Sol Wurtzel, West coast head of the William Fox Studios, will ever forget some of the aviation work which I have done around and above this great plant. Nor do I think that Ben Jackson, who holds a responsible position with the same company, will ever forget the time I thought that I'd been overpaid for a stunt and refunded part of the money to the company treasurer.

Even our own companions have a healthy respect for

one another's abilities. Personally I can think of no greater stunt man than Ray "Red" Thompson.

Red was built like a Yale fullback. Not so tall, but stocky and with shoulders that were massive. He had a grin that was known from coast to coast, and reached almost as far. He was not bad-looking—there was a lot that was attractive about him besides his red hair and freckled face—and he was exceedingly popular with all of us. The way that man could handle horses was a pleasure even to Tom Mix. And ride? It seemed as though he were sitting in a Turkish rocker. Once he made a bet that he could drink a glass of water while a horse was bucking—and he won.

But he won his fame jumping horses from cliffs into water. Where I considered a dive dangerous he would walk up and survey it and then take a horse over it.

One dive in particular lives among the tales of wild stunts in Hollywood. A cliff which was about sixty feet in height was selected as a possible thrill for a Western picture. The director wanted a horse to jump over it with a man clinging to the back of the animal. The producer agreed that there could be no better major stunt, but where was the man that could do it? What jumping horse existed that would negotiate the leap? Professional cowboys and trick riders alike shied at it. It was just one of those things which could not be done. For two weeks they hunted in vain for someone willing to take the risk.

And then Red came back from location. He had not been in town an hour when his telephone was buzzing with calls from the studio. He went to the location and sur-

veyed it carefully. The conditions under which they proposed to make the thrill were terrible. It was no wonder that the rest of the professionals had refused.

In the first place there was no runway or approach. Just an uneven pathway which zigzagged back and forth, and a rock arose abruptly half a dozen feet from the cliff. It would be necessary to make the horse jump this first or remove it from the path. The cliff itself was not perpendicular, but slanted, making it necessary for the horse to do a distance jump as well as one from height.

Red turned to the location manager.

"It seems to me," he said, "that you bozos are trying to kill both me and a horse. Is this the way this thing will have to be done? Won't you let me pick a spot to do the jump?"

"No," answered the assistant. "This is the spot which the director says is ideal."

"And you're not going to clear a runway?"

"Certainly not. It would ruin the effect."

Red yawned. "Well, I guess you're not looking for me." He got into the car and directed the chauffeur to take them to the studio.

"But," said the assistant, "they said you'd do any jump in the world."

"Yeh? Well, how deep's that water below the cliff?"

"I—er—why we haven't measured it yet."

"That's great," said Red, "but I happen to know. I've already had one company bring me out here to survey that cliff and I know what it's all about. Now I'll tell you. If the company really wants that dive and wants me to make

it, all they have to do is to clear a runway four feet wide to the edge of the cliff. Then when that's finished have them put a few sticks of dynamite in the water below and blast a hole so my horse won't hit bottom and break all of his legs, or split his belly open. I wouldn't make my horse kill himself for you or the studio or all of motion pictures."

The next day the same official called him, and Red was told that if he would do the stunt the conditions which he had outlined would be met. So the contract was drawn and on the day Thompson led his trained jumping horse up the incline.

The rock had been removed, a smooth path some sixty feet long had been cleared, and the water below was almost fifteen feet deep.

No cameras were on the top of the cliff. All were set up below in order to catch the full effect of the spectacular dive. The final instructions were given, and Red mounted his horse at the end of the runway. On the side lines was an assistant, who was to give the signal that everything was in readiness.

What a feeling, a thrill, a man gets as he sits and waits for the word which means that he is to do something never before attempted! You sit there and wonder. You philosophize on your judgment. Is it really possible to do this stunt and not get hurt? Or are you overrating your ability? If the latter it means hospital or morgue. The nerves are all keyed, your eyes are clear and bright, for the excitement is bound to pervade your entire system as it does the systems of those around you. Your muscles and mind

are ready, anxious. If you knew it to be the last moment of your life, knew that in the next few seconds they would fish you out broken and crushed, you would not want a delay. Everything within would be hollering to you to get the stunt over with.

Even Red's horse seemed filled with excitement. It pawed and jumped. It reared on its hind feet and chewed excitedly at the bit. It knew, for Red had many times before used him for this work.

Then came the signal. The assistant director had moved out of range of the camera. Red leaned over and stroked the side of the horse's neck. He said a few kind words to him. Then he drove the horse forward at full speed.

For fifty feet they seemed to fly, the animal digging his forefeet into the rock and turf viciously. His tail was straightened out behind him. His lean muscles stood out like knots, and his thin belly heaved with excitement and exertion. A beautiful animal, this white horse. As brainy and as courageous as his master.

Then for the first time the horse saw the cliff. Before him was an abyss such as he had never before experienced. Surely these men could not mean for him to jump that. Even a horse has that primary instinct, self-preservation. He dug his hind feet into the rocks, scattering a shower of sparks. His front feet stiffened, and although he was but ten feet away when he decided that he was not going over, he stopped at the bare edge of the cliff.

With a frightened snort he backed away and stood there meekly, as if partially ashamed of his lack of nerve. He did not rear nor paw now. His poor front legs were shiver-

ing with unnatural excitement and fear. He was panting and wild-eyed. It had been a narrow escape. The most he had ever jumped before had been slightly more than half this distance.

Red patted him again and, dismounting, led him back to the starting point.

After the horse was sufficiently calm they tried it again, but with no better success. He made the spurt, approached the cliff, but when he saw that great distance before him he went wilder than before. He knew that he had reached his limit. He feared that terrific impact to the tender muscles of his belly. He knew that at thirty or thirty-five feet the shock even to a horse was painful, and this jump was beyond his comprehension.

But the jump had to be done. Red had given his word that it would. For the third time the horse was led back to the beginning spot, and this time he was blindfolded. He could not see where he was going. He could not know when the edge of the cliff was reached. He would be given the reins and they would be off.

Red did not laugh. He disliked fooling his white Arabian, but he did not want to spoil a day's shooting. Moreover, it was taxing his own nerves to be prepared for the plunge, to be all set to leap from the horse as it leaped from the cliff. To be fooled was not more pleasant to him than the leap was to the horse.

The blindfold was in place, the horse calm. Again they started. The horse put his shoes into the ground and they were off. This time it was sure. The cameras were grinding. The horse was now in view from the bottom of the cliff.

But a few feet remained before he would make the leap. Everyone was tense. Again the drama of great moments in the lives of little stunt men was at hand. But no! The horse suddenly dug his front feet into the turf, bracing himself with his back, and in the very same spot where he had baulked before.

That horse could not be fooled even by a blindfold. His horse sense had told him that this was just a ruse, that he was covering the same ground. And he so judged his distance that he stopped on the very same spot. Horse sense, horse judgment, is far superior to man's at times.

The stunt man scratched his head. For the first time the Arab had the better of him. Then again the horse was led back. The blindfold was removed at his owner's command. And for five minutes Red kept everyone away as he talked in a confidential, soothing tone to that high-strung animal.

Again he mounted. He did not say one word to those waiting. He let them give the signal. He leaned over and smoothed the mane of the horse with his hand, and petted it with words and soft slaps. Then he gave the horse the gun. I mean he started it down that now well-trodden path. He urged it on. As before, the horse was going like nobody's business. They were almost to the spot where everybody knew the horse would dig his feet in and put on the brakes. Almost—but at that moment the unexpected happened. Red turned in his saddle and gave that animal a terrific slap on the rump. The Arab forgot to dig those front feet in or to hold back with the rear ones. Instead, he was so surprised that he leaped with all four far up and out into the air.

It was a beautiful leap. It carried him beyond the edge of the cliff and they started falling. In a graceful semicircle they turned over in the air. The horse's head was straight down. Now they were on their back. And Red had made no effort to leave. Evidently he was going to hit with the horse. More than that, it looked as if the animal were going to land directly on top of him.

It did. With a terrific splash they both hit and a spray of water and foam many feet high arose as they disappeared under the water. A few seconds later they came to the surface and Red climbed on the back of his beautiful mount. He rode him to the bank of the pool. It had been a perfect dive. Just what the company wanted for the picture.

But Red was not paying any attention to those that crowded around him. He was leaning over the horse. His rough, freckled hand was around the animal's neck.

"I'm sorry I had to do it, old man. It was a dirty trick, but it's the only way I could get you to go."

The animal was standing there very straight. The nervousness was gone. So was his jumpiness and unsteadiness. His big eyes were rather pitiful to look at as Red handed him a lump of sugar. There seemed to be something aggrieved in them, something a horse would like to tell a master.

Red turned to the troupe and said: "Arab's feelings are hurt. He didn't mind the jump one bit, after he got started, but that's the first time I ever hit him in my life."

XXI

TROPICAL WHALING—TWO MISHAPS—THE SQUADRON CLAIMS GENE

It was shortly after Red jumped his horse from the cliff that he was sent to the South Sea Islands on a tropical picture. On this picture he was not a stunt man, but for the first time in his life was offered a technical job. This particularly pleased me because Red had been hitting a pretty tough pace, and the trip would give him breathing space to recover the vitality which he had lost during his long stretch of stunts.

I believe that these brief pauses in our work keep most of us alive. It is seldom that one stunt man or one flier is killed. Usually a streak of bad luck carries an entire group of us with it. Perhaps this may logically be superstition, but if it is, it is a pretty general one among us.

Looking over my career, I find that these periods occur at a particular time of the year—a period which extends from the autumnal to the vernal equinox. Most of my serious accidents, those which have scarred me or sent me to the hospital for any length of time, happened within such limits.

I do not think that this period affects all of us. It just happens to be filled with potentiality for me. I know that

Red did not believe that there was any season either for him or me. Nevertheless, he was as pleased as anyone with the thought of a long cruise and nothing to do in the way of hazards, except a little swimming among the sharks.

But all of us are subject to many surprises and he got his on that trip, just before the expedition was ready to sail for home. The tropical shots were "in the can," with the exception of one, and in that an element of luck figured. The boat with its motion-picture company must sail in tropical waters until a school of whales was sighted. The whales would be a signal for action. The boat would plough into the centre of them and wait for the right opportunity. When one of the giant mammals came up alongside a stunt man with a harpoon was to jump overboard and dig the spear into the flesh of its back.

Of course this was not really the way in which these brutes are usually obtained—except in tropical countries. There hordes of natives row out into the Southern Pacific in small canoes to await an opportunity for the battle. But as this was to be a tropical picture, everything in it had to be true to life, even the spearing of the whale. For the stunt one of the best and most daring of swimmers was on deck. He had guaranteed to accomplish what was wanted for the picture, and had been taken on the trip for that specific purpose.

Always while there was daylight there remained a watch in the crow's nest and another in the prow of the boat. But it seemed that the whales knew of Hollywood's intention; at any rate the men's watchfulness was unrewarded. It

began to be a discouraging search. It looked as if the thrill would have to be faked in the studio.

Then one bright tropical morning came the call from the watch:

"School of whale abaft the starboard bow!"

And that was a signal for action.

The decks were gotten into condition, even before the vessel was turned and headed for the spouting mammals to the right of it. Cameras were set. The double was placed in position, with the harpoon rope coiled and in neat readiness for his leap. Stripped to a minimum of clothing, he stood awaiting the opportune moment.

Everyone was tense. It was the second for which they had waited. A brief interval of extreme excitement and they hoped that they would have the "shot" which would spell their return to the U. S. Added to this natural feeling was one of concern for the double. What would happen if he missed striking the spot and should be thrown and beaten as the animal floundered away? Or what would happen when he did strike the thing?

The question of doubt did not linger long in their minds. Quite abruptly, and before they were within what they thought the bounds of the big school, one whale suddenly appeared so close to the side of the boat that it almost struck it. Then amid the excitement on deck and the huge waves that the mammal naturally caused, a little drama was enacted.

The stunt man stood there as if petrified. He did not make one move to go overboard, but instead backed away, pale and evidently half scared to death. Of course no one

could really blame him. The monster had arisen with such terrifying suddenness, and apparently without the slightest fear of those on board, that it was really cause for anyone to think twice before leaping on top of it. Again, this was an exceptionally large specimen, at least eighty feet. But these things a stunt man should not think of—or he should think of them before his employers take him into the unknown waters of the Pacific.

The director was wildly hollering for him to jump, the camera men were still grinding, and the personnel of the troupe were excitedly running from one place to another. But still he stood there—and dropped the harpoon.

A man's body was seen to leap at the weapon. Just a bare second he hesitated, then without touching the sides of the ship he was overboard. It was Red Thompson!

He landed squarely on the back of the fleeing whale, just behind its head, and in almost the same second and motion his arms descended with the instrument of death. That whale must have gotten the shock of its life. At any rate, it whipped the water a couple of times angrily with its broad flat tail and sounded.

Everyone had expected Red to let go as soon as the harpoon was buried in the animal's head, but no—he went under still clinging to the rope. And when the mammal came to the surface a few seconds later the stunt man lunged again, pressing the spear (which was already in and impossible to withdraw) further into the huge head and into the brain. Even then he did not leave. For long minutes he fought, just a small object on the back of the

giant of the sea, and soon the thing ceased its struggles and was drawn to the ship.

Red was helped aboard, and of course there's no need to say that from then until the ship landed he was the hero of the boat. His action had been sudden and entirely uncalled for. He had saved the company valuable time, and incidentally had gotten a better thrill than they had dared hope for.

So that's how he took a little rest from stunts.

But while Red was in the South Seas for pastime things were not going so slow for us at home. In the first place, Wesley May, one of the most daring and at the same time one of the cleverest of parachute jumpers and aërial gymnasts, had successfully climbed out on the motor of Earl Dougherty's ship and had actually whirled the propeller after it had stopped in the air. It was one of the finest exhibitions of stunt technique ever to be photographed.

Yet Wes went up to make a parachute jump near San Francisco some time later and the unusual happened to him. He made the leap with the same precision which he always exhibited, but he landed in the top of a tree in a graveyard and fell onto a tombstone. That killed him.

With me life was most uneventful. I made a couple of slips, but neither of them amounted to anything. One occurred while I was making a jump of thirteen feet between two nine-story buildings. I was to run along a fire wall about two feet wide and when I came to the gap I was to jump, clear the intervening space, and land on the wall of the building opposite.

That was not difficult. Almost anyone could broad jump

thirteen feet, so I imagined that this was going to be just a pastime.

I got in position, and as usual never focussed my eyes on the spot where I intended to land until the order came from the director to go. Then, digging my toes in, I sprinted for the gap. When just about to reach the end of the building someone yelled:

"Stop!"

Well, for some reason I tried to before I came to the sheer drop of nine stories, and when I was just a step from the edge I realized that I had made a mistake. It couldn't be done. Giving all the strength I had to that one last step, I sprang forward. But there is a great difference between a running broad jump of thirteen feet and a standing one. At least it would be almost a jump from a standing position.

Instinctively, when I came to the edge of the other building I did not try to land on my feet, but lunged head first, and this probably saved my life. I hit with just my arms and part of my chest on the very edge, with not enough leverage to pull myself up. Still, I had a good enough hold to keep me from falling. It was then but a few seconds until I wriggled myself completely up on the other side, and gave one quick glance at a spot where I darn near landed—on a cement street a hundred feet below.

That was once when I had a perfect right to call my hand, and what I told the person who tried to stop me in the middle of a stunt I don't think anyone would believe. However, after I had cooled down somewhat we did it over, and this time I had no vocal interference whatsoever.

Shortly after this I went with a small states' rights picture company under what was supposed to be a long-term starring contract. Several times previously I had had such opportunities, but because I did not like to get away from the stability of established concerns I had refused.

However, I was persuaded that I could never amount to anything by always being a double and a stunt man, and I finally accepted an offer from the Scharlin-Taylor Productions. And I must say that as far as the Scharlins were concerned they were not only good employers to me but also very good friends. I think I did more stunts for them in a few days than I had been used to doing for big companies in a month. But I liked it because I had everything to say as to how and where they were to be performed.

While we were between pictures I was given permission to stunt for other concerns. So I took a contract to wreck an automobile over a cliff. This is where I made the second slip. All I was supposed to do was to stay in the seat of the car until the front wheels left the incline. Then it was up to me to jump. But again it was proved to me that stunt men are liable to make mistakes.

Just as the car was ready to go over, when the wheels were on the very edge, I found that my departure was somewhat tardy, so I had to stay with the thing while it made its various gyrations. I did have sense enough to get down on the floorboards and hold to the steering post, which saved me from severe injury. Nevertheless, when they pulled me out some two hundred feet from the starting point I had a broken right wrist and two broken ribs,

besides a gash over the right eye which cost me a few stitches.

That rather forced me to ease down a bit—particularly the wrist. Ribs heal comparatively fast, but a wrist? I'd rather have an arm broken any time. And during these rest periods I always got a chance to visit my friends, whom I usually neglected while on the job.

I went out to see Bud Creeth, to talk over a few of our old plans and some that weren't quite so old. When I got to the field he and Murphy, the famous race driver, had just come down from a hop. They noticed that I was bandaged and naturally inquired how it happened. I explained. Bud laughed and, turning to me, said, "Well, you'll get it first, then this race driver will go—but as for me I'm going to fly long and straight."

There's a peculiar thing about that statement. Murphy was killed very shortly afterward when he went through a fence in a race that I believe was held at Altoona, Pennsylvania.

And not a great while later Bud was testing a new type of ship not properly designed and constructed. He had flown it about thirty times and it acted perfectly under control; but at best it was considered somewhat of a freak. Suddenly one aileron was seen to crumple when he was five hundred feet in the air, and the thing just about did a barrel roll. . . . Bud got his. He was dead the minute he hit.

Poor Bud! And he was the one who was going to fly long and straight. He who had reached over with one long arm and given me a new lease on life. Well, I suppose I

Pulling out the "flyin' broncho-bustin' buckaroo."

should have known that he, like all the rest of my near friends, would join that ever-growing Squadron of Death, but I didn't think that he'd get to it before me.

We were feeling pretty low the night that happened as we gathered, the few who were left of the old gang. Now there were but Red Thompson, Pauly Malvern, Duke Green, Bob Rose. I had lost just about all who had become real friends. There was Gene Perkins, but Gene was married and that made a difference. He was usually home with the wife and babies.

Gene and Pauly were working on a picture which required many and various stunts, so naturally they were pretty well worn out at the end of a day's work.

Shortly after this Gene and Pauly came to me and wanted me to do the flying for a stunt in which they both figured. Pauly was to be on the top of a passenger train; Gene on the end of a rope ladder. They wanted me to fly over the train, get into position, and drop Gene to Pauly. Then they would put on a fight on top of the coach. Of course Pauly was really there to help Gene land safely.

I put in a bid for the work, but my price seemed far in excess of the studio's pocketbook, so another pilot was engaged, one who had had little experience with making changes from airplane to train, or airplane to airplane. Of course we all knew that the element of danger to the man on the ladder was materially increased by such methods. But what can a studio do when a man guarantees his work? They could not know that the low price this man offered them was an expression of amateurishness.

Perhaps there are those who will think that this is just

an indication of narrowness because I did not get the flying. But I really don't think that anyone either in flying or in stunts will ever say that I regretted losing a job. I am more or less fatalistic about those things; I never push myself for any stunt. I would rather have them offered to me than to go after them, and I never seem to be idle very long. So I wished the pilot the best of success.

They went on location at Riverside, California, and everything was prepared in accordance with Gene's wishes as well as those of the pilot. The particular stretch of track had been selected, and the train stood ready to make its dash. The rope ladder was attached to the airplane and hung in its proper place so as to be out of the way of the landing carriage on the take-off.

The signal was given and they were off. As had been previously arranged, the plane circled the train and got into position. The train put on full steam as the airplane tried to swing into position. Twice they skidded over the telephone wires that bordered the track. The pilot was not approaching directly from behind. On the third try Gene was on the lowermost rung of the ladder. A very dangerous position, since if his strength gave out he would be helpless to climb the rope to safety.

It may have been his added length to the rope ladder. It may have been a mean cross wind. Or it may have been just a misjudgment of distance. But from whatever cause, as they passed over the wires and then dipped down toward the speeding train, Gene's body was flung against the side of a coach.

Pauly Malvern was waiting on top, helpless. He could

do nothing. He watched the ship slide over the train, just a little bit above it. He watched Gene at his arm's length. Evidently the side swipe which he had received hurt him. He hung almost limp in the wind resistance at the bottom of the ladder. Certainly he must have broken some ribs. Once or twice he could be seen endeavoring to make a rung. But the efforts were futile. He did not even pull himself out of the full-length position. Pauly from the train top saw him shake his head in hopeless negation. He knew that the other's efforts were unavailing. There was but one thing for Gene to do—and he did it!

No sooner had he left the bottom of the rope ladder than Malvern jumped from the train—from the top of a passenger train making fifty miles an hour! But they were buddies; they had been the closest of friends for years. And when Gene shook his head Paul knew.

They hit the ground about the same time, Pauly rolling over several times and coming at once to his feet—unhurt.

Gene lay where he hit. He was not dead, but terrifically injured. He had landed on his feet, true to his wonderful instinct of body control in the air—but what difference did it make? No one can fall five feet from the bottom of an airplane in full flight and live. At least no one has.

But after a fall of approximately fifty feet it seems incredible that he was alive at all. His leg bones had pierced the heels of his shoes, and then some. He was injured internally, still he was conscious.

"I—I couldn't hold on any longer, Paul," he said, and then lapsed into unconsciousness.

Of course it took the train some time to stop. It took the

troupe some time to get to the spot where Gene lay. Now I can understand why Pauly jumped. He was there to get that message.

Gene was rushed to a hospital immediately. He still lived. What exceptional vitality! What power of body and mind to hold together in such a broken condition! To fall from the ladder of a ship and live to say a few conscious words.

Those few dear ones gathered around, and either the day before Christmas or Christmas day Gene opened his eyes and endeavored to smile. It was a pitiful attempt, but it was there. In a weak voice he murmured:

"Don't worry. I'll be all right—in a few days." And he joined, too!

XXII

MORE OR LESS LUCK AND A VACATION

The period which followed Perkins's death was an unfortunate one. One of my mechanics, Jimmie Barton, was cranking the propeller on a ship in which I was about to take the air. Just before I started, after the motor was warmed and revved, he held up his hand to keep me from starting and pointed to the tire. Evidently it lacked air pressure. He put his weight on the wing and then raised up, perhaps to see if a slight bounce was sufficient to blow it out on the landing.

The motor was turning about six hundred. I shook my head negatively, certainly this would prove no test. If it needed air it should be put in then, as it would take but a few minutes. He paid no attention to my nod, and I was shutting off the motor when a peculiar thing happened. He staggered back from the wing of the ship as if shot. Blood spurted in a stream from his throat. It was not as a person ordinarily bleeds from a cut, but in throbs that sent it inches past his chest.

Even as I cut the switch and ran to him I knew what had happened. As he dipped the wing it brought the propeller close enough to the sandy ground to pick up a

pebble, which it hurled with bullet-like velocity toward him. No expert marksman could have aimed with more precision.

I grabbed him by the throat, clapping my hand tightly over the hole. Then with the aid of others on the field I rushed him to an emergency hospital.

No one dreamed that his life could be saved, for everyone was sure that his jugular vein had been severed, but when a medical examination was given him it was found that the stone had lodged itself just one sixteenth of an inch from that important connection to life. However, he still bears a scar from the experience, and when I saw him a few months ago he said that two years later they removed another pebble which they had overlooked. He also told me that he had never tested airplane tires in that way again.

The next thing I heard was that Gladys Roy had been thrown from a horse during the making of a thriller and had broken her leg and injured her back. Gladys was evidently not as good with horses as she was with parachutes, for at this time she held the women's world record for altitude jumps.

Poor Gladys! When she did get well she finished the picture and then went back to her old game. It was one with which she was entirely familiar. She had been around airplanes for some years. Yet she stepped from the cockpit of a ship, over the leading edge of the lower wing, and walked right into the propeller! No need to say that she was instantly killed.

It is a peculiar thing that even some who are familiar with the danger that accompanies a twirling blade are

killed. This is easily accounted for, because those who work around airplanes get careless or forget, while those who are ignorant of this peril never know until it is too late—if they do then.

And just about this time I almost got mine while I was walking wings; or rather climbing underneath them. I was hanging to the wing skid. The skids on that ship were semi-elliptical pieces of bamboo, placed under the lower panels at the outer end of their span to prevent the tips from being injured should the wing drag on a landing.

We were doing our stuff like no one's business. I would hang by my knees, hand, or anything that came handy. Finally I decided that we had performed enough and was just at the point of climbing to the top of the wing when the rear end of the bamboo gave way. Luckily I was at the front, with only my legs wrapped around the broken part. But should I have been in reverse position I probably wouldn't have had time to recover from my surprise before I hit. As it was, it let me down with such suddenness that I didn't at first get wise to the real condition of things. But when I did, do you think it took me long to ease my way to the strut above? Would a fox stop to scratch a bite if he had a hound after him?

But then my good breaks have kept me alive. Parachute jumpers, high divers, wing walkers, race drivers, and daring pilots are all placed in the big hangar of this Squadron of Death. The Old Man with his scythe is not particular and mows most of us down sooner or later—some sooner. He figures that the law of averages is against some hazards more than others, and consequently he picks his teeth

on the bones of those who attempt them more frequently than he does on the bones of conservative ones in our clan.

So he picked on Shorty Osborn. Shorty had done every kind of parachute jump imaginable, even to making several attempts at breaking the record of falling before pulling the ring. So in looking for newer and greater thrills he happened to pass the Palisades at Santa Monica. These cliffs border the Pacific Ocean and rise perpendicularly some three hundred feet into the air. At their base is a bed of hard sand and granite, at the top a comparatively level stretch of parkway, fringed at intervals with palm trees.

He stopped. Here was a new one. Why wouldn't it be possible to make a parachute jump from this spot? A smooth runway could be built, even planked, to the very edge of the cliff. Then he would strap on a back pack and mount a powerful motorcycle. With a sufficient run, the 'chute ought to open—especially if he pulled the ring a few feet before he reached the cliff's edge.

He took in every little detail: the proper amount of space required for the run, an actual measurement of the Palisades at their highest point, and his probable landing spot.

The thing was all set, and it was no small crowd that gathered to see this most unusual exhibition of the daredevil. Cameras were set below at the foot, in position to catch the motorcycle and its rider from the time they left the cliff until Shorty left the motorcycle and floated easily to the sand.

Never once did the determined face give an inkling that

its owner felt the least doubt of the final outcome. As Osborn strapped the parachute he was smiling. Then he straddled the 'cycle and declared himself ready.

At a thrust of his foot the machine bellowed forth its sharp staccato notes. He surveyed the stunt just once, then shoved the motorcycle into gear. With a push he was on his way. He gained terrific speed in the short spurt and when but a few feet from the edge of the cliff took the necessary position to make an immediate getaway from the piece of machinery that was carrying him. Suddenly the pack opened and out floated the long white 'chute. Somehow or other it looked like a shroud as the man and 'cycle leaped the cliff with it in their wake.

I think we'll drop the curtain on that quick descent. At least we will make but a brief story of it. He left the cliff. The parachute trailed. It fluttered in the wind. It did not open. The man did not leave the motorcycle. All three landed on high-tension wires—and broke them. Then they hit the ground. The man got the worst of it.

But that short story tells of misery. It leaves to the imagination how the body was broken and crushed. The legs were splintered in a dozen places, and the bones overlapped grotesquely. Again those old familiar words: "He was rushed to the nearest hospital." Nobody—even doctors—thought he had a chance to live. Spectators could not imagine a life surviving a fall from such a height. The doctors could not believe it, judging from a medical point of view. But the bones were all set. And in time Shorty opened his eyes and regained consciousness. More than

that, he struggled through all the pain of coming back, of living. And he still lives, though he lost some two inches in height because of the necessary overlapping of the bones where the legs were fractured.

After Shorty had his narrow escape from death an Indian chief declared that he could hang by his hair. It sounded unbelievable, but the cameras were gotten out and dusted and Art Goebel was engaged to fly him. Long before this Art had established himself as one of the greatest stunt pilots on the coast. He had worked with me on several jobs, including the states' rights pictures, and with Frank Tomick had flown for the changes from airplane to airplane which we made for this company. So the necessary equipment was arranged and the chief's hair was tied to a rope.

Well, everyone was very much surprised. The Indian did just what he said he would do! At an elevation of fifteen hundred feet he crawled to his position and slowly let himself hang by the roots of his hair. Then he swung his arms free, while his body dangled in space.

But this was not enough for the red man; he wanted to try parachutes—not one, but ten. In other words, he expressed a desire to use ten parachutes in making a descent from five thousand feet. His idea was to fasten them all to him and then jump. After the first parachute opened he would cut loose and open another. So on until he had freed himself from nine and opened the tenth.

He was flown to the desired altitude and he jumped. Successfully he cut loose from three, but forgot to look at the ground often enough, and on the fourth, which had not

time to open, he hit and lay very still after bouncing twice.

The chief was not with us long. I wonder if the boys let him join the Squadron of Death?

It is my firm belief that many of these things should be regulated. At the present time I never cross the centre of a big city because the height necessary for safety to a landing place is not an economy of money nor of time. In the last five years I have never stunted except as part of my work.

Not many years past it was a dare to take a ride in a ship, and it was still quite an achievement to fly one. A cloud of romance hung about the dare-devilishness of such an unusual accomplishment. What a laughable thing that is to think of now!

The sudden flooding of the market with cheap war left-overs made this phase pass. No more were people attracted by the mere sight of a ship; indeed they hardly noticed the loops, barrel rolls, and tailspins of those more theatrically inclined. Thus we passed into another period, that of jumping from airplane to airplane. And following this were others, such as crashing airplanes intentionally, long ocean flights, refuelling in mid air. All of these different stages had their effect, some for good, others not. But in a small way those of us who have stunted and barnstormed have kept the public slightly curious about our game.

Furthermore, we almost had to do the spectacular to keep the public interested. Most of our rudely constructed fields were financial flops and the pilots always about half starved—or would have been if it were not for some of our

silly stunts. It was hard to get many outside people interested in flying, and courses of instruction went begging at a hundred dollars.

We needed some impetus to change it from a game to a profession, and that impetus was given to this country in a great measure by Colonel Lindbergh. After his remarkable flight people seemed to sense the possibilities that lay behind this new mode of transportation. It was definitely recognized as another means of travel, with the result that now our fields are rapidly becoming known as business centres, with a network of air lines covering our entire nation. The dream of all old-time pilots!

To the unceasing work of our progressive Department of Commerce belongs a great share of the credit. It has regulated fields and pilots, created new standards of construction and discarded the old. The entire country is spanned by beacons and revolving lights. Many necessary restrictions were ordered, such as condemning the old and dangerous surplus war stock. But long before the department took control the principles which it now stands for were in the minds of those of us who had been with the *game* (and it was a game) a few years. Only we did not know how to get that regulation. Then we resorted to municipal and finally state legislation.

Now the old habit of stunting is passing into the discard and rightfully so. It has no place in the established industry, except for military and naval manœuvres. There it should stay. I believe that sooner or later we will find strict laws governing this sort of thing. New and improved ships will make any stunt avoidable, therefore unnecessary. But

the game had to go on. Thrills were wanted for pictures.

Warner Brothers called me for a stunt. Perhaps I forgot to say that this company was no longer small. It had struggled and had worked, and, while large companies had ignored it, it had gotten a firm hold. When it blossomed out everyone looked!

Anyway, the thing which I was to do this time was nothing at all. Doubling for the star, I was to walk along a trestle, over which one of the fast trains ran. With me, also doubling a principal of the cast, was Al Mazola. We were to let the train approach until it was so close that it would be impossible for us to reach the end of the trestle. Then in final desperation we were to throw ourselves over the side and hang just below the ties while it passed above our heads.

Huh! Things never seemed to work out quite as I planned. We were on the track all right when the train started over the trestle, and we were walking, just as we had been told to do. But a train travelling as fast as a limited does, between fifty and sixty miles an hour, does not take long to catch up with a couple of doubles travelling on two legs. Of course we ran, and when the front of that engine was about two hundred feet behind us we started looking for places.

Have you ever been in an automobile travelling along at a fair rate of speed and have it pass fairly close to a high wooden picket fence? Somehow or other every piece of wood is blurred into the next. That's exactly what happened then. Every one of those railroad ties lost its indi-

viduality! Of course I'd have to pick one that wasn't there at all, and I stumbled. More than that, I went down—flat on my face. *What* an embarrassing position!

It didn't take much instinct for me to know that I wasn't going to be able to get to my feet and run to the side of that trestle in time to avoid a collision with that engine. It didn't take me long to decide that I had to do something. So I did it. Half rising to my feet, I leaped into the air, hoping to get out of the way of the cow catcher and the wheels. Well, that was a long second, but I partially won. The front of the engine missed me. That is, those parts which I wished would, did. But the piston caught me and completely knocked me off my balance.

At least I was out of its way, and at the same time I had managed to catch a tie. Then I began to wonder, as the wheels were passing over my head, just where Al Mazola was. When I looked to my right you can imagine my surprise to find him hanging right next to me.

The stunt was all right, but I felt the sting of that impact for several days. So when we got back to Hollywood I decided to take a rest. After all, I'd been hitting the pace pretty hard myself, and thought that a few days up in some mountains would do me good. That night when I saw Georgie Smith I asked her if she and her mother would like to accompany me. She didn't think that her mother would, but as for herself she thought that she might. Of course I insisted strenuously that her mother ought to go along to chaperon—and this won the argument. Georgie would go alone.

So she packed her suitcase. I packed mine. And we got

into the car and headed for the ship. When she saw what I was about she looked at me dubiously.

"Didn't you say that this was to be a vacation?" she questioned.

"Yeh," I answered in perfect American.

"Then why bother to take the bus? Let's go in the car."

I finally persuaded her that where I was going would take half of the time for our vacation if we went by automobile, and she was just game enough to accept my viewpoint.

We flew to the Santa Cruz Mountains—up to the home of friends who had been kind to me after I had made that spectacular and unexpected crash for Tom Mix. They were old-fashioned Germans who had lived in those rugged redwoods during the greater part of their lives; an elderly couple still romantically happy in their declining years.

And why shouldn't they be? Their little farm was their own. Just a garden spot in God's scheme of things. Rugged mountains arose on all sides, clothed in the grandeur of the majestic redwoods, trees which seemed to whisper secrets of the ages to those who would listen. Their very fragrance seemed to create an atmosphere of contentment and peace. A mountain stream sparkling in the golden rays of the sun murmured its way in and out among them, passing so close to the house that one could stand on the moss-covered veranda and watch the mountain trout dart quickly about in the icy water. In the small clearing one could see the vineyard, from which came the grapes that supplied the

excellent table wine. What a change from the nervous tension of stunts and the excitement of the city!

Every evening Georgie and I would sit together and watch the water go bubbling, singing on its way. We watched the shadows grow longer with the sinking of the sun behind the wilderness of the trees, and we watched the moon rise and watch over things of the night. Long after the last grunt from the pigs and the last "moo" of the cows we were still watching.

The splendor of the scene and the warm August breezes must have hypnotized us. We breathed and lived that Nature with which we were surrounded. I made vows which I never knew existed. So did she. And usually in the midst of all this romantic talk out would pop our little German mother and drag her off to bed.

XXIII

A CRACK-UP ENGINEER

Flying home from that vacation with Georgie Smith I had lots to think about.

Was it right for me to take an innocent girl from a care-free life and drag her into an existence which would prove to be one of ceaseless worry? She had told of her reactions while watching that fire dive at Fox, and at that time we hadn't even met. What would her feelings be if, loving me, she should see these things done? I wondered how she would act if she saw me injured or killed.

Then, too, I thought of my possible reaction to marriage. I'd always have to be thinking of the girl and I'd always say to myself, "Well, you've *got* to come out of this stunt! You don't dare go to the hospital!" An attitude like that is the very one which sends you there, because it shows that you're worrying, and worry is not conducive to the calmness needed in stunts. For my own protection I must be a care-free stunt man, rather serious at times but never thinking or caring whether I go to the hospital or not.

Inwardly, however, I am serious, and carefully weigh the chances I take in a logical and mathematical way. That, I believe, is the reason why one director said to me:

"You're no stunt man. You're really a crack-up engineer." He could not know that I had taken my mathematics seriously when in college.

However, I had not saved any money, for I am not a good business man in that respect, so the most I ever had was a few thousand at a time, and money would be necessary with this. It was not unnatural then that my mind should be puzzled with this maze of disquieting thoughts.

Was this game, then, to rob me of the greatest thing in life? Would I always have to be just a stunt man without thought of a family and a home? Must I be a man grown to maturity with nothing to look forward to but stunts?

Yet I had all of the instincts of other men. I wanted to love and to be loved. I wanted my laughs, and I surely got my heartaches. I had my likes and dislikes, though I had not the power to hate. I guess I realized then that I could have almost anything but the woman I loved.

If I quit? I laughed. I could do that. If I stood by my desire it meant a life of torture to her and maybe, just a maybe, my desire to be careful for her sake might make me yellow. That seemed improbable, impossible—the thought of being a quitter, a coward! Yet . . .

I landed at the field and got out. I was back after the first vacation since coming to Hollywood. I was back as a stunt man, and the romance which had held me was gone. There, the mountains with its redwoods and its streams; here, the city with its business and its traffic. There, play; here, work.

So I went to work. When I got home after taking Georgie from the field I found a hurry-up call from Mal

St. Claire asking me to report to him as soon as I got back from my vacation.

After getting in touch with the company I found that they wanted me to crash a rowboat on the rocks at Laguna Beach, and that they wanted it that same afternoon. The only way I could get there was to fly, so I went back to the field and forty minutes later was hovering above the cliffs for a landing place. I saw but one small level piece of ground, and it was only about two hundred feet long, but I finally plopped the ship in it, though I broke a tail skid in turning to avoid going over the cliff at the opposite end.

I was rushed immediately into the double's clothes and given a rowboat instead of an airplane, which after several attempts I managed to ride upright through the breakers and near the spot where I was to do the crash into the rocks. The breakers at this point did not look any too inviting as they splashed away at the mussel-covered boulders, but I knew that by leaving the boat as it was being carried over on its back I would be comparatively safe. And I was.

One big wave rolled under the small craft, lifting it high into the air. Then as the boat was carried along by it, I found myself following out my plan of action. I climbed to the prow and had just enough time to start my dive when the thing turned completely over. A little fight with the rocks and I swam out.

I was ready to go back to Hollywood, but on account of the minor repairs which had to be performed on my ship it was impossible to leave that evening; and I was not sorry as it had been a more or less strenuous day.

So I was given a room with an assistant camera man. His work was not easy, either, having to lug the camera paraphernalia around all day, so very early in the evening we piled into our respective beds. While we were lying there, naturally some conversation followed. He asked me about my past: how I happened to get forced into stunts and why I took the chances I did for such a small return.

Naturally, I took a similar interest in him. I wondered just what his tale of life had been, and what his ambitions were. First he told me nothing. He answered questions which required a "yes" or a "no," but beyond that nothing. Then, just as I was going to give up, he opened up.

For three years before he got his first job in pictures he had been a "stick-up" artist! Well, when he told me that I got the biggest thrills of my lifetime. A man I had known for almost two years, and one who looked like a youngster just out of college, a criminal! At the time I wondered if the couple of hundred dollars that I had in my trouser pockets would be there in the morning. Upon further inquiry he told me that the most he ever got from any of his jobs was eighty dollars, and quite frequently he got no more than two to five.

For a man to risk his freedom, his citizenship, and his honor for such meagre returns seemed very foolish to me, and I knew that I'd rather take my chances in another way. However, he told me that since he had taken his job with pictures he had gone straight, that he had turned over a new leaf, and that he had never held up anyone—unless the studio gave him a layoff! I didn't sleep so well that night.

By the next day the tail skid of my ship was repaired and I flew back to the field.

Shortly after getting to my little home I was resting in a comfortable Turkish rocker thinking over the life of excitement which I had been leading lately and of the various thrills in which I had participated. What would the logical end of it all be? As I sat there I realized one thing. I had enough aviation work to keep me busy without taking on stunts of any other nature. Why, then, did I not confine myself to just this one field? There was no necessity for doing the many and varied thrills to which I had accustomed myself. So I made another rule. There should be nothing but aviation in my life henceforth.

Even as I was thus thinking the telephone rang. It was Billy Wellman at the Paramount Studios, and he wanted to see me immediately.

His rise had been phenomenal since the days when he worked at Fox as assistant director for Bernard Durning. After Durning had completed *The Eleventh Hour* he had taken the picture to New York, and it was while he was there that he contracted pneumonia, from which he died. That threw us all for the loss, but I think no one felt it more keenly than Bill. But it did not stop his climb toward success, for he had directed a couple of pictures for the Fox Company and several for Paramount.

When I got to the studio I paused outside of a door that read "William Wellman, Director" just long enough to realize that Bill had been wise in his move to give up aviation after his thrilling and spectacular war experiences, and then I popped in. A few minutes later I was

shown into his private office, where we gassed over old times in general, and some of my stunts in particular. Then he said:

"How's your flying these days?"

"Well," I answered, "I'm still making a few hot landings."

"Then listen," he continued. "I don't want you to give me an answer until you've heard everything I want. Nor do I want your answer until you've considered fully just exactly what you will have to do. And if you think the stunts I propose are impossible, that they can't be successfully done, I want you to tell me so candidly."

I listened. This began to sound interesting.

"They have given me a big air special to do. It is to be called *Wings*. I hope it will be more or less of a history of the war from the air, therefore it must be realistic. In order for it to be all that I want it will be absolutely necessary for me to have several intentional crashes. That is the reason I called you. I know that when you say you will do a stunt you will do it."

For no particular reason I thought of that first stunt for motion pictures, when I was so startled at the director's command that I fell the fully forty feet to the net, and I had to smile in reminiscence. Many hundreds of stunts had passed into and out of my hands since.

"What I want from you," Wellman continued, "are those crashes. They are not easy. I believe that they are the hardest crack-ups that will ever come to you. I don't believe as long as you continue you will be up against any that are more difficult.

"I'm not trying to scare you, but you know as well as I the danger of crashing the old S. P. A. D. That's to be the first one. And it's not just a regular crack-up, for it will have to be a dead stick landing in No Man's Land. And I mean No Man's Land. It will be just as true to life as it was over there—barbed-wire entanglements, machine-gun nests, shell holes, and all the rest of it. More than that, this is a motion picture. It becomes more difficult than actually crashing in war time because you have to land with respect for the cameras. I want the ship to end up on its back, not over fifty feet from the nearest camera."

He looked me over closely, and I know that he was wondering inwardly just what effect this description would have on me. But unlike actors, stunt men have a habit of concealing their innermost feelings. It is necessary to their work and it becomes a habit with them to use it in every-day life.

"What speed does a Spad make?" he asked, though I knew that Bill knew, for he was with a unit which had used them.

"Depends on the motor," I said.

"I think that these have 180 Hisso's," he said.

"Then they should make a little over a hundred and thirty," I answered.

"Well, you know what you're up against in that one, and if you think you have done any other to equal it, it would ease my mind to hear it. But that is just a beginning. We have three and possibly four similar hazards. The second is to crash a Gotha bomber into a building,

although under what circumstances we have not yet decided, and the third will be to crash a D-7 Fokker, with a two-hundred-horse Liberty, into the ground shortly after it takes to the air. Perhaps you realize the speed necessary to put one of these German scout ships in the dust under such circumstances."

I did. Moreover, I realized that the job which he was handing me was the toughest one in my entire career of stunting and of flying.

"And the fourth stunt you are not yet decided about?" I asked.

"That will come later, but these three are the important ones. Now, Dick, I've given you something to think about. When you've made up your mind, when you've considered every angle and every risk, come back and give me your answer. There is no rush. All I want you to do is to give me a 'yes' or a 'no,' and if it's 'no' I won't blame you."

"Well, I wouldn't blame myself, either," I said, "but if I decide to take them can I arrange the order in which to do these things?"

"Certainly," the director answered, "but why that question?"

"You see," I said, "I'd like to fix it so that the easiest comes first, then follow with those that I consider are the more hazardous, leaving the most difficult to the very last."

"Arrange them to suit yourself. We will fix the shooting schedule to conform more or less to your wants."

I got up to leave. Knowing what was expected of me,

Hold your hats and keep your seats.
There'll be a little dust.

I had a lot of thinking to do before signing my name on the dotted line.

When home I tried to figure just what the chances of escaping were. I got the technical data on each one of the ships so that there would be no miscalculation. I even went into the construction of them all and planned how to brace the Spad, which had a wooden fuselage, and where to weaken the Fokker, which was constructed of steel tubing. The latter, I knew, would have to have either the struts or the wing beams sawed. It was so well made that I might not get enough dissipation of forces as I bumped a wing or hit the undercarriage or bored into the ground with the nose.

But the more I figured the fewer conclusions I arrived at. I must see the actual conditions under which each one was to be done before I could tell just how hazardous the whole thing was.

Again, the characteristics of each of the different types of ships entered into my calculations. I would have to fly every one of them and become acquainted with them before I could tell just what could be done with each. It has been my observation that you can take two ships of identical make, having the same power plant, and apparently rigged in the same way, yet one will be a real pleasure to fly and the other just a labor.

Of one thing I was sure: the arrangement of the stunts should be mine. There was no psychology in this; just common sense. By doing the one which seemed the easier (if any of them did at this time) first, it would insure both the company and myself of the second one, whereas if I was

injured on the first severely enough to send me to the hospital then the picture would be shy a thrill, and so would I.

In a way it was another of those blind chances. The thrills might be extremely hard to do. They might even be impossible. On the other hand, I might walk out of them without a scratch.

Indecision and inability to solve the actual problems made me realize again that we are not our masters. Fate and the Great One are ever present. So literally I threw up the sponge, or tossed a coin, or something.

I took the receiver from the hook and got my number. A few seconds later I was talking to Bill Wellman.

"Hello, Bill, Dick Grace talking. I think I've figured those stunts over enough. I'll take the job."

And that settled that.

XXIV

. . . AND THEN THEY FINISHED THEIR PINOCHLE GAME

One of the most important items in connection with crashing airplanes is a contract. In this instance this was mere form. Not the general form, but that which it has been my lot to sign. It contained the usual liability clause—releasing the company from any claims that my "heirs, descendants, or assigns" might have in case of a fatality. Of course, I was guaranteed hospital care and funeral expenses, and besides I came under the workingman's compensation law which allows $5,000 for death and lesser amounts for permanent injury. However, subsequent events proved that a contract does not always mean so much, for they showed a generosity not usually found in industries which employ thousands of people.

The order of the crack-ups was inserted at my request, the terms stated, and the signatures attached. As I was signing I wondered just a little bit what this contract would involve and I think, even at that, had I known I'd have put my X on it anyway.

I was told that I might be gone on location at Kelly Field, San Antonio, anywhere from three to six months,

so I very wisely packed all of my belongings, labelled them properly, and put them in storage. After I had sold my car I felt perfectly footloose. Nothing that could possibly happen would fool me now.

On September 6th we boarded a couple of special trains and started on our journey to make *Wings*. Perhaps my feelings, as I saw all the old landmarks pass by, were not those of the rest of the troupe. Others could go on this location with freedom of mind. They could enjoy the change of cities and of companions for these few months. But for me there would be no peace of mind until the last crack-up. There was a heavy responsibility on my shoulders. I had to deliver satisfaction. I must produce results. And what a task had been given me!

I was not sorry that I had taken the job. I was happy that I now had more crack-ups to do, but I was worried as to the outcome. What if I should overshoot the mark? Then the shot would be a failure, a ship would be ruined, and I might injure or kill some of those who were expecting me to land as directed. But it was easy to throw off this last possibility. I know that any ship whose stick I hold will *go when I say* as long as its controls hold together. And any ship that was supposed to crash in at a given spot would certainly go in there. These are things in which I have the entire argument to myself.

San Antonio met us with its best brass band. The mayor was there with other city officials and had most of the cars of the fire and police department to take the company to the St. Anthony Hotel. But being only a stunt man I grabbed me a taxi. I never cared an awful lot about receptions in

the first place, and I wasn't much of an outstanding figure among that array of stars and cast in the second.

Then after the liberal hospitality of the South was enjoyed for a few days, work began for me in earnest. I went to Kelly Field and watched my ships being unloaded. There were two Fokkers and two Spads. They were placed in Hangar No. 2, which eventually became a work and repair shop for those planes which I was to use for the crashes. A ground crew was assigned to me to make the alterations which I thought were required for my work, and Frank Tomick was placed in charge of the ships.

But my hangar was not the only one which was busy. This was an army picture, that is, one portraying the aërial phases of the war from an army standpoint, and things were going along in the usual efficient army way.

Great squadrons of De Havilands were lined up ready to take off. Numerous Douglas O-2's were in readiness, and units of Martin bombers, cumbersome elephants of the air, could be heard droning overhead. A squadron of the latest type of fast pursuit ships (P-1's) were brought from Selfridge Field, near Detroit, Michigan, and camera ships were flown from Crissy Field in San Francisco. Twenty-four hangars full of ships would be used in making the picture *Wings*. The great majority of the army's aërial forces east of the Rockies were assembled here for this venture.

What a thrill, as those whole units took the air for review by the commanding general! Certainly no martial music, no honor that could be bestowed, could induce that feeling as one by one the squadrons of three's passed the

reviewing stands in perfect formation. There's something about the hum of one powerful motor that gets under your skin if you've been with the game any length of time. But when that sound increases to a roar that rattles the windows, as hundreds of them pass, then your heart just seems to open up enough to hold a whole Liberty motor.

I can't get a thrill out of a crack-up when it happens (though I do as I see it on the screen afterward) and I get no sensation out of flying, but just to watch a good formation of ships will give me a kick every time.

From the moment that I witnessed that review I was proud to be a small factor in the making of this picture. With such resources it could not fail. The labor, time, and money that such an undertaking required were stupendous. I was never connected with any production which was to be so enormous; one in which the individual played such a small part. The thing had to work as a machine, and where else could such a perfect one have been found as in the branch of the service that was to be pictured?

But I also had my work. One of my little Spads had been completely overhauled and rerigged. It was ready for a test. So I put on my helmet and goggles and got in the buzzard. It seemed good to me once more to get into this ship. It was so small that I could almost reach over and touch the radiator. Certainly for a crack-up it was a good thing that I was not exceptionally tall, for no man of six feet would be able to pull his head into the cockpit.

After testing it on the blocks I took off. I had been in the air but a few seconds when I realized that I liked this ship. Not only because it was a Spad—I liked that par-

ticular Spad. It controlled nicely, though it was somewhat logy. What Spad was not?

Immediately I felt a friendly attitude toward it. I liked its personality. So I proceeded to show it in my own way. I looped and spun it and did the usual book of tricks, and was just nicely over in a barrel roll when the motor coughed and died. It was rather embarrassing because I didn't think I was within gliding distance of the field. Spads are heavy, and glide like rocks. But I did manage to squeeze over the hangars and drop the tail skid over the starting line. Relief? Well, rather. It had not travelled more than a hundred feet after it was set down, so you can imagine that I had held it off as long as possible.

What can you say when a friend lets you down like that? Still, others who are my friends have dropped me much harder, so this wasn't a really tough break, even if it was on a first flight. Minor repairs were made, and from that time until it crashed never once did it give me trouble.

I did not have long to dwell on such small details as a motor konking. There were many revisions to be made before the little buzzard was ready for its death. Spads have a big gas tank situated directly under the feet, which feeds by pressure. I did not like this. If I should happen to go over on my back and the tank should break I'd be due for a bath of gasoline. Not that I mightn't need the bath, but I was thinking of the possibility of fire. So I wanted a small tank installed on the top wing which would feed the motor by gravity.

There were many other changes which would also take

considerable time. The linen had to be stripped from the fuselage that the longerons could be taped. And then as long as these last members were of wood I believed that a square arrangement of Shelby steel tubing was advisable at the top and bottom of the cockpit to keep it from collapsing at that important place. Lastly, I needed a new arrangement of the safety belts, for I had found that the one webbed one around the hips was no protection against hitting the instrument board with the head. This sudden bump is disconcerting at times, because it breaks the neck. We have found this out by close observation of crack-ups in this type of ship. Strangely, there is often no other injury, and no other mark on the body.

Besides these details, which progressed rapidly under the management of Harry Reynolds, there was the spot to pick and to prepare as well as the crew to select to protect me after the crack-up.

Billy Wellman, Lucian Hubbard—who was Famous Players' producer of *Wings*—Harry Reynolds, and I went out to look over the battle field.

Although I had been told that the company had had six hundred Mexicans working every day for a couple of months, it never dawned on me that it could be such an immense set. Almost as far as the eye could see the country was in a devastated condition. Shell holes twelve feet deep and three times that in diameter pitted the whole place, and as I saw them I made a mental note that I could just kiss myself good-bye if I ever struck in one of them. Barbed-wire entanglements were so realistic that it was with difficulty that we made our way through the tangled

Smashing into a speeding ambulance train with perfect timing and accuracy.
From LILAC TIME.

mass. They were of real wire and the cedar posts were sunk two feet into the ground and protruded almost four above. My second mental reaction was to wonder what would happen to the ship and to me when we struck them. However, I was relieved when Bill said that a twenty-five-foot section would be built from balsam slabs, which are very light and break easily. Also, instead of wire on those posts we would have yarn or rope strung. It sounded good —if I could find the small section, travelling at least a hundred miles per hour and at the same time controlling the ship to a crack-up, which in itself is no mean job. Besides concerning myself with the technique of handling the stick, it was necessary for me to start an automatic camera, cut off my switch, close the throttle, turn off my gas tank, hit an exact spot, and protect myself. Protect? Well, when you smack the nose of an airplane at that rate of speed and stay with it, you haven't time to take any measures of precaution. The best safeguard is to do the stunt as you have it mathematically figured, and if you haven't struck a wrong balance nine times out of ten you'll pop up without a scratch. The tenth time I never let occur to me—when I get to nine I start all over again. It's the only sure way to beat that law of averages.

Anyway, the spot was picked. I was shown just where the cameras were to be placed, and ye gods! To make matters worse I had to head right into them. There were to be twenty-one grinding on the stunt. If I missed I knew that cinematographers' salaries would go up in Hollywood because I'd take half of them with me so they could photograph that Squadron of the Dead. Not only

that, but I noticed that the head camera man, Harvey Perry, had placed his parallel directly in line with the spot. That meant that I could not change my mind; that once I decided to do the dive it had to be a success. Half of the troupe would be grouped around that parallel and I knew that Bill Wellman and Lucian Hubbard, with other officials, would be on top of it.

I certainly hope that no one ever puts too much confidence in my ability to lay a ship where and how they want it.

After we left the war zone I put Harry Reynolds in charge of the rescue crew. The emergency fire apparatus of Kelly Field was given us for the stunt, and just for protection we decided to have three men with large extinguishers to rush in, should the ship catch fire. Ross Cook and Captain Campbell, the British ace, were in charge of the remainder of the detail. They were given ten men, each of whom had but one instrument of rescue. This was to avoid confusion should I be injured and pinned in the broken wreck. Included in the group was one with a four-foot pair of cutters, another with an ax, and still others with pliers, hammers, wood and hack saws, steel cutters, and hatchets.

That question settled, we turned to first-aid equipment, but this was quite simple. We had an army ambulance in charge of a regular physician; but as an added safeguard a hospital airplane was kept near at hand to rush me to the base hospital at Fort Sam Houston.

Final instructions were given to each one of these groups not to start any operations except at the command of

Wellman, who would signal Reynolds when it was safe to enter the crack-up zone. Also none was to enter it, except in case of fire, until the cameras stopped grinding. Even if I were seriously injured I figured that a few seconds would not make any difference one way or another, so why not get the shot for the picture? There was just one more little detail. If I was all right afterward I would kick the rudder of the ship. Then they would know that for this stunt, at least, I had not needed their help.

After all of these details had been attended to I again went to see how the alterations on the little Spad were progressing and was pleased to find that it would be ready for testing on the next afternoon. I wondered how it would fly with all of this extra equipment, such as cameras, storage batteries, and machine guns. Certainly it would be heavier than ever, for though the big gas tank and most of the instruments had been removed, quite a quantity of Shelby tubing had been added, as well as a head pad where the instruments were or had been.

Now everything was arranged. The crews were ready and the ship would be on the next day. All I had to do was to wait. But that waiting is nerve-racking, as I found out later. A week passed. I had tested the ship and had hangared it until I was given the word. In the meantime I organized a pinochle game with Frank Tomick and "Gunboat" Smith.

It was during this period that a certain event happened which had a psychological effect on me. One of the fliers tried to make a turn too quickly and lost his flying speed. He immediately crashed into the ground and was instantly

killed. The type of ship he was flying was not much faster than the one I was to crash. The nature of the ground into which he plunged was not as hazardous as hitting posts and shell holes. I began to wonder.

A couple of nights later we got together and proposed a toast to our departed comrade, and after we had drunk him on his way someone proposed that as long as I had a crack-up coming they should all have a drink to me. So we all drank me on my way, though I was present to wish them wrong. Lieutenants Cornelius and Thad Johnson were with us, and we decided that they ought to have a toast too, because they were flying the army P-1's which were supposed to shoot me down. They were both truly daring airmen and were instrumental in organizing the army's famous Three Musketeers, which later came to grief. Thad was killed after escorting Colonel Lindbergh on one of his trips, and Cornelius met his at San Diego, directly after an aërial exposition in Los Angeles.

But while we were having this last toast the telephone rang. It was Bill Wellman. He informed me that the crack-up would be the next day between eleven and twelve o'clock and to hold myself in readiness.

In readiness! I had been ready for weeks. However, that ended the toasts for that night. Now that I knew that it was just about to happen I could go to my suite and get a good night's sleep, and strangely enough I did. There was not a thought of what might happen on the morrow as I crawled into bed.

The morning was typical of Texas in September. A crispness was in the air which filled me with vitality and

an eagerness for the job before me. The sun was bright, though the borders of the earth were trimmed with huge white clouds—clouds which always fascinated me.

Purposely I did not start for the battle field until ten o'clock. I did not wish to look over the ground and live over the stunt again and again before it was necessary. So Gunboat and Frank and I sat down to our cutthroat pinochle and became so interested in it that we forgot time. At ten-fifteen we had to quit, leaving nobody with a game. That was bad, but the picture needed a crack-up, so we all three went to the location.

A great crowd was there when we arrived, and as I passed through it I could easily hear the odds against me. Some were betting five to one that I'd be killed; others had bets of ten to one that I'd never walk out. Naturally, I bet on myself.

Wellman, Hubbard, and I walked over the ground for the last time. We figured just about where I was to dig in and approximately where I'd end up. When we had completely covered all of the ground we gathered the forces: the rescue crew, ambulance corps, and those on police or fire patrols. They were a serious-minded, serious-faced troupe that bade me good-bye as I hopped into Lieutenant George Rice's army transport. The next time they would see me would be after the crack-up.

Already at Kelly Field my little baby Spad was warming up. It was r'aring to go, even to its own funeral. I stroked the back of the fuselage with a feeling of kindliness. It was not quite right to do this deliberate thing to a friend. And it had been a friend. As many hours as I

had sat at the controls it had given way but once. Always it had answered controls, had done as I had wanted. And now it was going on its last flight for me.

I put on my leather coat and my helmet and goggles. I got into the seat and adjusted the safety belts. Then I "tuned up" the motor and the little ship tugged at the blocks as if it also were eager to go. The two P-1's with Cornelius and Thad Johnson were also roaring in a test, and farther down the starting line I saw a squadron which was to escort me to the battle field. We were all set. A few minutes to wait and it would be history.

Wellman was to telephone me when they were ready, and it was a long wait for me and my little ship. I guess it must have been particularly so to the little Spad I was riding in, all dressed up in its new clothes awaiting its death.

Then came the call. A mechanic rushed from the hangar to the starting line. It was the order to take the air. Again I gave the gun to the motor to clear out the barrels, and I fastened my chest safety belt.

Then just as I was pulling my goggles over my eyes someone clutched my shoulder. It was one of my friends, and there was a wild, frightened look in his eyes.

"For God's sake, Dick! Give it up. It isn't too late yet. Tell them motor trouble, or that you're yellow—anything. But don't do it; it's certain death."

Now wasn't that a break? One of your best friends comes to you with tears in his eyes, telling you you haven't got a chance. And he knew that I wasn't one who would ever back out, even if he was right.

I gave the little baby the gun and the wheels left the ground. Simultaneously the two P-1's took the air and then the escort squadron.

As we headed for the spot I rather wondered what those in that escort squadron were thinking. Did they believe that they were an aërial cortège? They rather looked like it because the location could not be missed. I laughed, though it really was an honor which I appreciated.

We were now over the No Man's Land and the squadron split in all directions, leaving me alone with the two P-1's, which were supposed to be the German ships to shoot me down. I dropped to an elevation of eight hundred feet and took off my goggles. I could not wear them because the splintering of the lenses might cut my eyes. When in proper position I dropped them and was pleased to see that they fell directly before the main parallel. That was my signal to those on the ground that I was ready, that the next time I buzzed over the spot it would be a crack-up. Then I awaited my answering signal and got it immediately: a red flag from the tower.

I manœuvred to position for the right glide that would bring me to the spot where I was to shove the little ship in nose first. When I had it I glanced back to see if the two German scouts were on my tail. They were, and how! It almost seemed as if I could reach out and touch them.

With a shove on the stick I nosed my Spad earthward and at the same moment felt a peculiar whizz. One of the Germans had passed over me so close that I felt his prop steam. They continued to harass me, apparently pouring in their deadly stream of machine-gun bullets. Then they

would zoom up just long enough to do a vertical so they could get into position for another attack.

But I could pay little attention to them. Closer and closer were the ground and the spot approaching. The time between me and this crack-up was but a matter of seconds now. Yet I felt a peculiar exhilaration. I had supreme confidence in my ability to do this thing and walk out. I smiled as I thought of all of those grave faces and palpitating hearts on the ground. They who were watching it were getting the thrill, and I who was doing it was the confident one.

Glancing at my air-speed indicator I noted that I was making a hundred and ten. That was too fast, so I cut down on the throttle. Now I was making ninety, but that was too slow. I was settling.

The German trenches were beneath me as I gave the motor a little more gun. There was only No Man's Land between me and the spot. It was now time for me to get busy. I started the automatic camera just as one of the Germans hissed one of his last good-bye dives at me. The trenches and the spot where I was to go in were less than six hundred feet away. I had to allow at least two hundred of that for the crack-up. It dwindled to five and snapped to four, flashed to three and exploded to two. Two hundred feet. Well, I'd allow another fifty. I'd give them a real close one. Just ten feet from the ground! Just ten feet to go. Speed—ninety-five miles per hour.

I jerked the stick over to the right, giving just a slight left rudder. The wing dipped and the fuselage swayed to

the left. In this position I knew the ship would be a cinch to go on its back, but that's what Bill wanted.

With a dull thud the wing hit and crumpled, then the landing carriage crashed. The poor ship tottered over to the other wing and broke that, and the thing started over on its back.

As it did I ducked my head forward. It was my one measure of protection, but it happened to be just the right one. With a terrific crash something wedged between my flying coat and the back of the seat.

But the last move of the ship was over. There was no more débris or dust or propeller splinters flying around. Again I smiled as I wiggled the rudder. Then I unfastened my safety belts, holding to the sides as best I could because I was upside down. To have fallen would not have hurt me, because there was just six inches between my head and the ground. I jumped into a shell hole as directed and waited until the explosions ceased around me.

When it was all over I climbed out and then I got a few surprises. I had intended to land close to the cameras and I hadn't missed. The nearest one was seventeen feet from the wrecked plane. What kind of nerve must a camera man have to see an airplane travelling at a hundred miles an hour crashing into the ground so close to him that he can almost reach out and touch it? My next surprise was that I had missed the areas with the balsam posts and had hit into those driven into the ground two feet and protruding about four. I thought I had missed the barbed wire and real posts. I wasn't so surprised to find I'd missed

that little spot, but I certainly was to find that I had pulled or torn fourteen of those posts from the ground.

Then I wondered what had wedged between my coat and the back of the seat, and that's where I got my real thrill. In making its last speedy manœuvre, that of going over on its back, the ship had plunged into a maze of posts, two of which had gone completely through the fuselage. One was uninteresting to me, for it was near the tail. The other had penetrated the cockpit just eleven inches back of my head! Had I not moved forward when I did it would have carried that important member of my body down to where my feet ought to have been. This gave me something to think of. Why did that post have to come so close? It was rather an uncomfortable feeling that I got for a moment as I wondered what kept it from coming closer.

I noticed one more thing. The tail of the ship hung in space, over the edge of one of those twelve-foot shell holes. If I had slid on my back as I hit it would have been too bad. I'd just have—— But there was no use ruminating on ifs. The poor little ship was dead. There was not a spar or rib in it that was not broken. From propeller to tail and wing tip to wing tip it was splintered and broken. It was as I had meant it to be. Still I regretted the loss of it. Yet I should not have been downcast, and wasn't. Lady Fortune had been with me all around, so I went over and had some lunch, collected my bets, and then Gunboat and Frank and I finished our pinochle game.

XXV

THE D–7 WINS

Much happened besides a game of pinochle in the next few weeks. There were more crack-ups. There was dog-fighting and there were ships on fire; then there was the one big battle scene when the concentrated offensive was supposed to take place against the Germans.

On this day every ship took the air, and that meant that the sky over the battle field was as if infested with a plague of locusts, so numerous were they. Squadron after squadron of De Havilands and Douglases passed over, followed by the big cumbersome Martin bombers. While these were dropping their loads the fast little scouts darted in and out like wasps, "strafing" the trenches or putting on air duels.

On the ground the machine-gun nests sputtered out their apparently deadly fire while armored tanks "klanked" their way over trenches and shell holes. The big guns spurted their blasts and the smaller guns backed up their bigger brothers' voices. Altogether it was just like war.

In the midst of it all two of the P-1's ran out of gas and had forced landings. Lucky stiffs, those two pilots, for they both walked out. One of them crashed into the side

of a hill; the other landed, but hit a ditch and went over on his back.

Finally the smoke cleared away from all of these scenes, and we scheduled the Fokker crack-up.

But to put a crash on schedule does not mean that it is to be done at any particular date. It is merely the last warning to be ready within notice. So I proceeded to prepare the Fokker for the stunt. It was much easier than prepared the Spad because the fuselage was constructed of steel tubing, thus eliminating the necessity of reënforcing it with additional bracing. But of course many of the other features which we had incorporated in reconstructing the little ship which I liked so much were also employed because from an engineering standpoint we had been right in our previous work.

Three days from the time that I was given the tip to prepare the ship it was on the line ready for a test with its complete crack-up paraphernalia. The crews were assembled and given practically the same instructions as in the previous instance. There was but one difference. This time the day for the stunt was to be kept a secret, because in other hazards, such as my first crash, we had had an unusually hard time to control the crowd, and to keep it from the danger zone immediately following the last move of the ship. Therefore we decided that the utmost secrecy should surround all of our movements.

I said that the ship was ready for the test. We thought it was, too, until I took it up for a final hop, because there remained but one thing to determine—the proper functioning of the motor.

The mechanic expected an O. K. after a short flight. So did I. When I took off the motor was turning up about 1700 r. p. m.'s., which did not displease me at all. It seemed to respond in every way. It climbed, dived, and banked to my satisfaction. There was some little rudder interference due to the camera being mounted too near the vertical fin, but it was not enough to demand a change.

So I decided to do a little hedge hopping, as I had in the morning in a flight from Kelly over to Leon Springs, where the German airdrome was situated. But I had no more than nosed the ship down than I developed a miss on about four of the six cylinders and just barely managed to limp back home and squat on the lower end of the field.

The mechanics thought it was trouble in the gas lines, because I had not turned on one of the tanks. This was opened and the ship taxied up to the starting line. One of the army's expert mechanics got into the seat, and when the blocks were under the wheels gave the motor the gun. It answered perfectly for the five full minutes he held it wide open.

He gave me a peculiar look as he handed the thing over to me for another flight. Again I was off, but this time it started to miss when I was but seventy-five feet from the ground and at the end of the field. I just barely managed to slip at right angles and land with the wind, contrary to all the rules of the field.

Again the mechanic came over. He had not heard the miss, and was somewhat surprised to hear of it. Nevertheless, he changed from one type of spark plug to another

and again tested the D-7. It was the same old story. It turned up its full amount of revolutions without a suggestion of a miss.

I sensed his feelings. He thought I didn't like to fly the thing, and in one way he was right. This ship which continually let me down began to get on my nerves. I did not like the idea nor the ship. It was not the type of plane, for nothing flies sweeter than a D-7 in perfect working order. The black Fokker (this one was gray) which I had in the hangar was the prettiest thing on motor and control which I had in the station.

But I felt no confidence in this one. I hated it, and I am sure that that same feeling was returned to me by that inanimate thing.

But the mechanic evidently did not believe that I had a serious miss, so after the spark plugs were changed I took off, banked at a low altitude, and turned with the wind. That brought me back to the starting line within a few seconds, and, just as I thought, the motor hit until I was in a half bank into the wind, then started sputtering and coughing like a person with consumption.

I smiled as I saw the mechanics gather on the line. At last they knew that I really had more than spark-plug trouble. Of course, I was forced down, and as I taxied the thing into the hangar, this time still missing, both the mechanics and I knew that they were in for some snappy work.

And how they worked! They changed timing gears and bored holes under the oil rings. They even changed pistons. New wrist pins replaced the old and the bearings were

refitted. But it did no good. Practically a new motor was built. Yet out of eleven flights I had eight forced landings.

And the more it let me down the more I cussed it. I would go some distance away and look at it with pleasure as I thought of what I was going to do to it. It would be a keen pleasure to bump this thing's nose into the ground, to hear that crunching sound as the motor pushed up against the gas tanks and the wings folded. I deliberately planned to smack it in as hard as I could without injury to myself.

On the other hand, maybe it would have the "ad" on me. Perhaps this was the one ship which would have the last laugh. The stunt was difficult—nosing in with full motor and almost full speed. Really it was not much more than an even break whether I walked out or didn't. I wondered which would win. Yet I knew one thing. I would do as much damage to it as it could do to me.

Finally we all got disgusted with the ship's eccentricities and shoved it into the hangar, where it sat with its lousy motor covered. It was awaiting its doom. If that motor would last me from Kelly to the field at Leon Springs that was all I asked. Just one half hour more in the air for it and another old ship would bite the dust.

We, the Fokker and I, were ready for the battle. Wellman and *Wings* were, also. I was given orders that the stunt would be the very next day.

Again, as soon as I knew for a certainty that I was due, I went to the suite and waited as patiently as I could for the rise of the next day's sun. But I was not able to sleep before this crack-up as I had on previous occasions.

My nerves seemed pitched unusually high. At one in the morning I got up and wrote letters. At five I was still writing. Then only was I able to drop into a troubled doze.

When I arose it was almost eight o'clock, so I hurried to Kelly Field. But once there I was told that there was no occasion for any rush, that someone had evidently forgotten to order the clouds. Before this clouds never bothered me. I had taken them as a matter of course in Texas during this period of the year. Yet here was a morning without any, which made it impossible to do my shot. The rest of the picture was filmed with these beautiful white monuments of the sky, therefore it was necessary for them to be the background for this crash.

I was disappointed. I had come ready and prepared to have it out with the Fokker, yet I was fooled. However, I did decide to fly the luckless thing over to the German airdrome, and so it was dragged out and the motor cover removed.

Remembering quite distinctly how it had tried to drop me on almost all of its previous flights, I gained some altitude before leaving Kelly. I felt quite safe with three thousand altitude and started the thing on its next to last journey.

With such altitude it was possible to find an emergency field almost the entire distance between the two points. There was but one stretch of about ten miles, where no field was available, and of course the motor took its usual course. It bucked and back-fired until I thought I'd be pretty lucky if it didn't catch on fire before we arrived.

Certainly I was thankful when I planted its two wheels

Winged spectres of Death.

and skidded on the short German field. This time I said nothing about the miss. I was getting rather accustomed to it, and if it ever did make a flight without acting up I'd probably have gotten out and pulled a plug so as to put it back in form.

All that day we waited for clouds, but not one appeared. The sky was as clear as the blue of a robin's egg. I was anxious, and so was the company. Every hour of sunlight meant thousands of dollars. But the sun retired behind the sagebrush and greasewood in a perfectly clear sky.

The next day was the same.

The day following was a repetition.

Four days following that completed a cloudless week.

By this time I was at the point of nervous exhaustion. In the evenings I would sit around the room waiting for the time when I thought I could go to sleep. But when I hit the hay I would live that crash over and over again, and try to figure out which one of us was going to come out second best. And if I dozed into a light sleep I would usually see myself getting the worst of it, and would dream that the thing was on fire and I was trapped in it, or that I lay with limbs broken unable to move in any direction, while gas poured into my face from the broken tank. Then I would awaken to find that the bed was soaked with perspiration.

This was worse than a prisoner waiting in his death cell for the fatal day and the fatal order that would send him up those last thirteen steps. At least he knew absolutely when his time was up. But me? I'd get the order only to get a stay of sentence.

We tried to make clouds. Huge quantities of shells were sent into the sky at the same time, but they formed only slight rifts against the blue, whereas we had been photographing definite outlines. Never until then did I realize just how much it took to make one small impression in the sky.

The sweats were weakening. I was losing weight, so I decided to do a little "stepping" to relieve my mind. The army was giving a big "hop" out in the dirigible hangar at Brooks Field, and being duly invited I dressed in a tux and appeared on the scene. Somehow or other I got mixed up in a procession which wanted me to go past the receiving line, and finally I obliged them.

When I came to Major General Fechet he turned to a man in civilian clothes and said, "Oh, by the way, Mr. So and So [I didn't catch the name], I'd like to have you meet Dick Grace, the young man who is doing all of these spectacular crashes for *Wings*."

The one in the tux looked me over and expressed some slight pleasure at the acquaintanceship, then said, "I'd like to see you do these things, Mr. Grace."

It must have sounded very abrupt as I answered: "Come on out to-morrow and I'll show you."

"Say," said the army officer at my side, "don't you know who that is?"

"Haven't the slightest idea," I replied.

"Well, get wise to yourself. That's Trubee Davison, Assistant Secretary of War for Air Service." Socially I am a complete flop.

Still, getting around a bit helped me to keep away from

too many mental Fokker crack-ups and at the same time tired me enough so I could sleep fairly well at night.

While thus socializing I met a youngster whom I had known in Los Angeles. I had given him his first ride in the air years before, shortly after Clover Field was founded. His name was Clement Phillips, and he was taking the army course of instruction. At that particular time he had just started at Brooks Field. How lives intertwine! I had much flying to do with him that neither of us suspected.

Another interesting person was one by the name of Blanchard, who had been in the R. F. C. He was one of our troupe, but did no flying. Always he kept telling me that he was going to build a ship when he got back to Los Angeles. We used to argue points of construction and I always lost. Eventually he built the ship and I still said that there was nothing right about it and refused an offer to test it. So did all the rest of the old-timers. So he tested it himself and killed a couple of others at the same time.

For two weeks this thing kept up. It seemed that the cloud manufacturer had gone on a strike just because I had to push in a D-7. I formed a habit of staying up until two o'clock or after, so that when I did retire I would be so physically and mentally tired that it was impossible for me to stay awake. My sleeping hours were narrowing themselves to a matter of minutes, yet with it all I felt as physically fit as I ever had in my life.

Then one morning I awakened and there they were. Clouds covering the entire sky. I did not wait for a telephone call. I did not need any signal other than that one

look out of the window. This was the day for which I had lived almost three weeks. The waiting was finished. In a very few hours a verdict would be rendered by the High Court in the case of the D-7 *vs.* Dick Grace. In a few hours I would be released from that prison and once again be able to enjoy life as I had before I flew the Fokker.

But for some reason I did not feel at ease as I rode out to the German 'drome. I had shaved, bathed, and taken a cold shower. I had had a good breakfast, yet with all of my morning's preparations I felt weary as I eased myself into the back seat of the car. Nor did I feel any better when I reached the field. Rather mechanically I went through the régime of directing and placing the different rescue crews. Listlessly I gave orders that the wing struts of the D-7 should be sawed. The cameras were set up at convenient angles. My preparations were completed. Reynolds, Tomick, and I went on a last inspection tour. We checked the first-aid division, saw that each man had his instrument of rescue, placed the chemical fire wagon and the men with extinguishers at various points. After that I drained all of the gas out of the ship and poured back just two gallons as a further protection against fire. A report was then sent to Wellman that I was set.

Climbing into the cockpit, I adjusted the belts. My helmet was already tightly strapped. Then I glanced at that troupe, watching my movements with panicky interest. Could they know what I knew? Was there any reaction in their minds? I did not believe so. Yet I knew that I was to be injured. Again came one of those few

presentiments in my life, and I could not ignore it or get the thought out of my mind.

Only Wellman seemed to guess.

"You're sure you feel all right?" he said.

"Absolutely," I replied.

"—because if you don't we could delay it a day or so," he continued.

"After all of these weeks of waiting? Not for anything in the world! Are you ready?"

"I'll give you the red flag. Any time after that. Only be sure to time your start with Johnson's dive for you. At that time you must be about seventy-five feet in the air."

I understood these directions perfectly. Thad was supposed to be Dick Arlen, one of the heroes of *Wings*, who crept to the German flying field, stole a ship, and then, banking suddenly, dropped down on an enemy who was taking off in pursuit of him.

"Contact!" I ordered, and the big motor broke forth in a howl of hollow explosions.

And with them there came a peculiar exultation to me. I was not the uninterested person of a few minutes before. I was r'aring to go; anxious to tear the Fokker's nose into the dirt and wreck it badly enough so they would touch a match to it where it lay, rather than gather up the débris.

I wanted to do it now. I was eager to start. Not because I wanted to have it all over with but to enjoy it as I did it. I wanted to hear those wings crunch and to watch the sky

disappear and the earth coming toward me as I started rolling over on my back.

I turned to my mechanic and smiled. In return he came forward to shake my hand and wish me luck, but that was my one superstition—never to shake before a stunt.

I turned the motor to its full revolutions, and for once in its life it did not talk back. It grabbed the gas as a race horse takes the bit.

A red flag! Johnson gave the P-1 the gun and was off in a cloud of dust. He made a beautiful climbing turn and verticaled back in my direction. The blocks were from under my wheels now, too. I also was ready to take to the air. I glanced once more out of the side of the cockpit to see if the field was clear, and also to locate the spot where I was to kill the Fokker.

Johnson was in position. It was time for me to get a mean start. And I did. I gave that old enemy of mine the works, and its tail spurted from the ground. The wheels seemed not to gather speed quickly enough, so fast did it gather speed. I was off; off for the last time with that enemy! Now was the time and place for our last struggle. Looking back, I could see the P-1 diving on me. He was coming closer and closer and he had to because I was nearing the spot for the crack-up.

Above the din of my motor I heard the roar of his machine guns. It was a signal. Now was the time. And the spot was there waiting for me. I smiled. Johnson and I had timed things nicely. That nose shot groundward, and as it did the motor sputtered and missed. It would have its way, even on its last flight. But it did not matter now.

It was going in. And how! My speed was a hundred and ten miles per hour. I knew that it was pretty fast—maybe too fast. Still I was anxious to see what kind of a crack-up such speed would make. More than that, I almost had to have it to get into the proper position for the cameras and to reach the spot. Then there was another reason. I hated the Fokker.

Between the time I shoved that stick forward and dipped a wing I paid it a lot of compliments. I could now. It would never miss or be missed again.

With a crash the wing tip went into the ground. The ailerons and the lower panel crumpled. The propeller split and shattered in a thousand different directions. I was satisfied. Everything was as I had figured. I was distributing my forces and my speed nicely.

Then happened one of those little things of such inconsequence. The landing gear, which was of steel, withstood the first terrific jolt and the solid beams of the wings did not break. With little of my speed slackened the injured wing lifted from the ground. The cross wind caught me, and I was in the air. My ailerons were useless—broken. I could not dig in a wing. If I travelled much farther the shot would be entirely useless. My motor was already out. I had "cut it" when the propeller had first hit the ground.

Now there remained but one course. I would have to nose the thing in, and a "nose in" is bad at any time. It meant that the full force of the crash would be transferred from the motor to the fuselage and to me. I pushed my chest against the belt so that there would be no snap as I hit, then I shoved the stick forward. I was headed for

the ground again. It loomed up so quickly that I gasped. This was too much speed.

I hit. I felt the terrific jar quite distinctly, and knew that my chest belt had broken. Something in my brain recorded the fact that I bumped the padded instrument board and that my head broke through it. Then I thought of fire, of how once before I had been so terrifically burned. Would this be the one time that such a thing would happen to me in an intentional crash?

All of these details perhaps took less time to travel through my mind than it takes for a voice to carry over the radio. I was still thinking and wondering when that curtain of darkness blotted out the daylight.

The D-7 won the verdict.

XXVI

A HONOLULU TAKE-OFF

When I awoke I was lying flat on the ground with a group of my rescue squad around me. They were just in the act of taking me to an ambulance. Some of them grabbed me by the feet and others by the shoulders. Then as they started to lift me the clouds must have bumped together. It must have lightened or something, for I received a shock that nauseated me.

"My neck—don't lift me. Let me stay here a minute." Again they put me on the ground, though everybody was in favor of taking me to the hospital.

"How did you get me out?" I asked.

"How did we get you out?" they inquired. "Why you did the prettiest fall from that cockpit I've ever seen," said Ross Cook.

I was silent for a few minutes trying to figure this out. The last I remembered was fearing fire, and being unconscious and unable to rescue myself from the burning wreck. Then the startling truth dawned on me. So fearfully was this dread of fire impressed on my mind that when I hit and broke through the instrument boards I had unconsciously crawled back to the seat and had fallen over the side of the ship. More than that, I was told that

I had crawled three feet away from it. Three feet—with a broken neck!

But I was given little time for reflection. The doors of the ambulance were waiting for me. My protests won, however, and I was allowed to stay where I was. After a short time I braced my neck with both hands and had someone lift my shoulders. Again I was on my feet. But it seemed as though a red-hot iron had been rammed into my neck. It burned and pained until I was actually dizzy.

Then I was called to the front of the plane to take a picture with Lucian Hubbard and William Wellman. That was funny. When they started setting up the still cameras I was standing between them, and when I saw the camera man again he was just ready to pack up his stuff.

"Aren't you going to shoot the picture?" I asked.

Everybody looked at me peculiarly.

"How many different poses do you want?" jeered the camera man. Evidently he had already taken them—while I was "out" on my feet.

"Guess I'll go to the hotel and rest," I said.

"The hospital's much quieter," said Bill.

But I went to the hotel.

Immediately I went to my room and flopped on the bed—boots and all. I attempted to find a position which would ease that almost overpowering pain in my neck, back, and shoulders, but it couldn't be done. It was there, no matter how I lay. I got up, took off my shirt, and was surprised to find that the neck was swollen.

All during the night it was the same. The next day also. I surmised that it might have been wrenched pretty

badly and decided to go to see a doctor the next day. First, however, I must go to see the location for my last stunt, so the greater part of the day was spent hiking over rough country. When I came in I started for my room, but only managed to get halfway down the hallway when I plopped to the floor.

I really began to think something was wrong, and so after I was helped to my room I called the company executive offices and told them of my troubles and was ordered to the base hospital at Fort Sam Houston immediately.

There Major Norman T. Kirk looked me over. I told him that I was somewhat in a hurry as I wanted to fly the other Fokker that evening. But he rushed me to Colonel Pillsbury and had X-rays taken. The two of them conferred for a few minutes when they saw the plates.

"Guess I'll be going," I said. "I'll be back to-morrow for treatment."

"You're not going any place, young fellow, except to bed!"

"Bed?" I repeated unbelievingly.

"Right! It's a wonder you live at all. You've got what is ordinarily termed in present-day language a—broken neck."

"What——"

"And that isn't all," he continued. "Your sixth cervical vertebra is dislocated—out of line an eighth of an inch. That's enough to kill almost anyone."

"How bad is—is it broken," I said with a sinking feeling.

"Well, you've got only seven of them between your skull

and your backbone, and you've got four of them broken—besides the dislocation."

"Guess I'll stay," I mumbled.

"Thanks," he said ironically.

What he didn't do to me when he took me to the operating room hasn't been performed yet by medical science. In the first place he bound up my chest bone, which was cracked, and then he strapped a harness of gauze around my head. This tied into some sort of arrangement of hooks and pulleys, and I was hung much as a criminal might be, with just the bare tips of my toes touching the floor.

The added pain sort of "washed out" my strength, and I asked for a glass of whisky. This down, I felt worse than ever. Finally I was convinced that to let him do his work right he should give me an injection. When I awakened hours later I was in a plaster cast which covered me from ears to chest—flat on my back, and if my guess was right I'd be in just that position for some time.

It is a peculiar thing that the first thought that flashed through my mind as I lay there in an absolutely helpless condition was: What an age existed between the time Locklear was killed and I got that broken neck.

Some time later it was decided that I was well enough to be moved to the Hollywood hospital, and so I was shipped back. But one thing Major Kirk told me: if I ever stunted again, if I ever crashed a ship or received a blow on the head, I could kiss this life good-bye. I know he is a great doctor. Certainly he is a good friend. But the Major forgot a stunt man's capacity for punishment when he made that statement.

On the Buoyant Wings of Love

With a broken neck he dove headlong out of a second-story hospital window to see this girl.

Just to prove he was wrong when I got back to the Hollywood hospital I had them immediately call Georgie Smith. I knew she'd be delighted to see me. And she was. When she saw that twisted face (I had a slight paralysis of the right side, which twisted my features out of shape) she let out one scream and departed.

The next day she sent a special messenger with a note which said:

DEAR DICK:

So sorry to see you injured. While you were away I became engaged to ——, who is directing for ——, so I guess it's better if we don't see each other any more.

I added blanks to my conversation and decided to go over and see her. But my physician in the Hollywood hospital had cut off Kirk's plaster cast, and my eleven weeks' growth of beard under it, and had substituted a harness of weights which tended to keep my neck under a constant pull. It would be hard to get dressed and out of the hospital without attracting attention, so I sent my nurse for some orangeade. In the meantime I unloosened the contraption and got my clothes. Before she was back I was dressed and had jumped out of the second-story window.

After all of this trouble Georgie Smith was out for the evening, so I walked back into the hospital again. Of course they were *somewhat* surprised, both at my leaving and at my being able to come back.

Six weeks later I was legitimately released and left to my own resources. I wondered if Kirk was right. Perhaps

I had better give it up—at least temporarily. I still had considerable pain. There was yet quite some pressure on my nerve centres. Major Kirk said that I would always be in such condition and I began to believe him.

So I invested my savings in an exclusive little Travel Shop in Pasadena and got a kick out of being a business man and a merchant. Certainly quite an extreme from my last stunt.

It was all right for a while. Then the boys began making over-ocean flights, and of course that appealed to me. If I could make just one long flight perhaps I might get some of this out of my system. According to percentages there was not much more danger in this type of flying than there was in crack-ups. Certainly Major Kirk could not object if I hit the water in between continents. I probably wouldn't get my head bumped. All I'd have would be a lungful of H_2O.

So I sold my paying little shop. Then I got a manager and interested him in the venture financially. With all he had and could get and what little I had we bought the ship and decided to fly somewhere. The best place to go or to come from, I thought, was Honolulu, so I packed my tiny little monoplane on board a freighter and embarked for the islands.

It took six days to get there, and every hour that we travelled I was thinking I could make the trip much more quickly than Mr. Matson's boats.

Still I could not exactly think of this adventure as a pastime. The sky was overcast with clouds and fog day and night, which was not encouraging to me, as I knew

that my little thirty-six-foot monoplane would be terrifically overloaded if it got off with enough gasoline to span that distance of twenty-five hundred miles. Furthermore, I knew of no field in the islands long enough or in good enough condition for the precarious take-off which was to be mine.

When I landed I was immediately taken to the naval base at Pearl Harbor and there began an intensive study of the conditions which existed. Commander McComb, who had been stationed at that base for some time, was of invaluable assistance in giving the actual facts, but none was so important as my mechanic, Carl Spangenberger. The buzzard had only one eye, but I'd like to be able to see as much with both of mine as he does with that one. Not only did he care for the motor mechanically, he rigged and doped the ship, and even slept with it to be sure that none of his adjustments were tampered with.

None of the fields on the island of Oahu met our requirements, so with an escort of naval planes I flew to the island of Kauai, where an improvised field was under course of construction for me. There again the hospitality of the islands was shown me through Lindsey Faye, who with the entire force of men from his plantation helped Carl build the field to my requirements.

Days were consumed with minor details. Algaroba bushes had to be removed and hollows filled in. My propeller, which had been broken in transit, was replaced by a steel one which arrived just before my first attempt at a take-off. Courses had to be charted and weather observations taken. Everybody was busy—so busy that we

averaged about three hours of sleep daily. They even put a naval guard around me in an effort to get me to rest. But do you think that I could sleep while weather reports were coming in? After all, I was the one most vitally interested in them.

Everything was in condition long before the weather was. Always there was a wind estimated variously between twenty and thirty knots blowing directly from the United States, which meant that I would have to buck it. It just couldn't be done. As it was I was travelling on a margin of two hours' gas. If I encountered wind I'd find myself looking for a service station about three hundred miles seaward from San Francisco.

Then late one night favorable reports began floating in. That was a signal for activity in our camp. By daylight we were ready for the take-off.

If you've never attempted to take a muchly overloaded airplane from the ground don't do it. That morning I gave the Whirlwind motor the gun, expecting of course to gather speed sufficient to lift me in about a thousand feet. Well, the ship just stood there—didn't budge an inch with full gun on till the man got back of the struts and gave it a push. Then I knew it was heavy. Slowly I moved out and got up quite some speed. The next jolt was discovering that I had not sufficient rudder for the amount of load I was carrying.

There came a sudden end to that particular morning's flight. The tires were not especially made and even with eighty pounds' pressure the ship squeezed them halfway to the ground. Evidently I hit a small stone and—

boom—the tire blew. I think I was making about sixty when that happened and I immediately started the prettiest series of ground loops you ever want to witness.

On the next two mornings I made three other unsuccessful attempts and was naturally beginning to get discouraged.

I realized one thing, however. I'd never get off at all if I didn't do it while it was still dark, because with the slightest sign of daybreak the air became light and unsupporting.

So on our next attempt we were waiting for those few minutes that precede the dawn, and at that carefully measured moment I gave the gun to the little ship and was down the runway. Conservatively I held the wheels on; yet this morning it seemed to get up speed more quickly, and I began to feel it get lighter on control. This was to be the take-off.

And it was. As I passed the last red flag in the hands of Carl Spangenberger I raised the wheels from the ground and was away. The cliff at the end of the runway I cleared by seventy-five feet.

What a thrill after such hectic attempts! Now most of my troubles were over—or I thought they were. I thought that all I would have to do would be to navigate and control the ship to the point which had been selected in California. But I was mistaken.

I entered a tropical rain, which in Honolulu they call "liquid sunshine." The rain did not bother me, and I knew it wouldn't my motor, but when in the very centre of it the ship seemed to shiver all over. I instantly thought I

had developed a "flutter" of the wing, but was soon convinced that this was not the case, for I went into a dive without having a thing to do with it. With the load of gas I had on board I thought that it was all over, because if the ship didn't go down I was a hundred miles from the island, and boats there were as plentiful as clouds were when we needed them for the D-7 crack-up.

I shut off the motor and pulled back on the stick and managed to come out just about fifty feet from the water. Then I gave the ship the gun again and got back some little bit of the altitude I had lost. At the same time I tried to spot one of the native sampans, but I don't think a boat was ever in those waters; at least, there was none there then.

All of the way back it was the same thing, first a stall then a dive, and I got more cheap thrills that morning than I've had in nine years of stunt work. Finally I sighted the island.

The next question was what to do with the ship now that I had it back there. If I came down for a landing and it suddenly went into one of those dives—— Well, with that load of gasoline it would be just too bad. Yet I couldn't do anything but try, and before I even started the attempt I knew that it was a crack-up. Again this would be a good one because I had to have about three-quarters motor on to have any control, and if it was full on I had none.

Just then the ship dipped again, and the wings and fuselage shook until my right foot was numb trying to keep even rudder on it. It had to stop. If there must be a

crack-up I'd have something to say about it. With a quick glance I sighted the biggest algaroba tree I could find and smashed into it.

If the flight was a failure that crack-up wasn't. And I didn't have any safety belts or special gas tanks, either. When I hit that tree I tore twenty-one feet of roots out of the ground. Of course I was thrown for a loss, but when you hit with a ship loaded with six and a half barrels of gas at about a hundred and twenty and just break a rib and a hand, what kick have you? I thought I was so lucky that I didn't have either of them set.

I had been given a little three-weeks-old wire-haired terrier for a mascot, and naturally the first thing I thought of when things quieted down was what had happened to her. Imagine my dumb surprise when I found her still sleeping. Her registered name was Kauai Lelani, but I called her Dizzy. Anything that could sleep through a crack-up such as that was is a little bit off.

Now she's seen her fourth intentional crash, and sits up and howls like a baby if I won't take her with me. And if you think she doesn't brag about it you're silly. Every dog in the neighborhood has to listen to her line.

XXVII

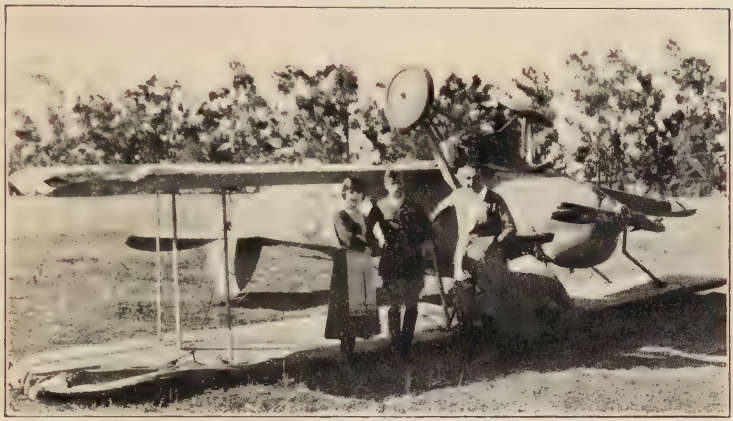
THE BUZZARDS ARE BORN

Everything I had was in the flight, so when I stepped from the train in Los Angeles I was not surprised to find that my total capital was just what it had been years ago when I first arrived in the city. I had just twenty cents. But my position was somewhat improved. I was acquainted. Now I was recognized as a stunt man, and so knew that I would not be in Hollywood long before work of some kind would be thrown my way.

Nor was I wrong. I entered into a managerial contract on the very next day with Edna Schley, who immediately signed me with First National Studios for a picture called *Lilac Time*. Colleen Moore was the star.

On conferring with officials of the studio I was tcld that I would be in complete charge of the aviation sequences of the picture. Furthermore, that it would be up to me to organize a squadron, which could do close and probably very dangerous flying. As an added attraction they made it plain that there were to be three airplanes crashed intentionally and hoped that I would undertake those with my other duties.

To do the crashes alone would have been a good job, but to find and build a squadron, to hunt up enough ships of



A neat crack-up for a movie queen.

As nimble and playful as dolphins in the sea.
Dog-fighting in Lilac Time.

one type and convert them to look like old war-time crates, and to locate a field in southern California that would look like northern France was a job that would keep me more than busy.

My first concern was the proper kind of a field for the take-off of seven planes in a line. If they had to be as close together as the director said, then I would have to have a field that faced into the prevailing wind, and one as smooth as it was possible to make it.

For ten days Frank Ward, the studio location manager, and I looked for a stretch of ground that would suit the technical requirements of the picture and my practical requirements for flying, but there seemed to be no such piece of ground in California. Once again we talked of going to Texas as we had on *Wings*. We had found but one field which I would O. K., and it was not suitable from a picture standpoint—the script called for a row of trees on one side and one end of the landing place.

We searched by airplane and by car and finally located about the only spot in the state that was ideal. Up in the mountains between Los Angeles and San Diego we came to a little plateau, the side and end of which were lined with giant eucalyptus. From a picture standpoint and for my purposes it was great. It was fully two thousand feet long and almost half that in width. Yet when we stepped out on the ground my spirits fell. The surface was so soft that my boots sank in to my ankles. I walked all over it and found the same general condition existing. Yet it was the only location we could find. This had to be the spot.

There were other drawbacks. Water would have to be

piped for over a mile, and six miles of telephone line constructed to make a connection to the nearest ranger station.

The field was my only source of worry, and a few days later that isolated spot in the mountains was a scene of activity. Men with shovels were filling in ruts, others were cleaning out bog holes and refilling them with sand and railroad ties, and a giant steam roller was crushing the soft dirt to the hardness and smoothness of a paved road. Hangars, tents, and war equipment had to be brought up those rough mountain grades, and it was just our luck to have a heavy rainstorm. Over the fourteen miles between our camp and the main road trucks, wagons, and automobiles were mired until pulled out by mule teams engaged for that particular purpose.

Another crew was converting my commercial ships. One mechanic was welding machine-gun mounts, others were making special cowlings, while still others were changing radiators, tuning motors, and checking ships.

Then came the formation of a squadron, which Director George Fitzmaurice had ordered capable of any kind of close formation work. Naturally I scouted around for any old companions, but Frank Clark and Frank Tomick were already engaged on *Hell's Angels*. Maurice Murphy was also with them. Leo Nomes was busy on a Fox picture. Ross Cook was the first one engaged. He had been with me on *Wings*, not so much as a flier, but as a technical man. However, I knew him to be good on the stick and so gave him Position No. 1 on the squadron. In other words, if I was sick, injured, or busy doing crack-ups Ross would command my squadron.

After a final test and check of qualifications I selected Charles Stoffer, Frank Baker, B. M. Spencer, Lonnie Hay, Clement Phillips, and a youngster by the name of Baxter.

What a peculiar squadron it was! In it there were apparently no two like personalities, nor had any two the same occupation before entering aviation. One had started out in life with the ambition to be a minister of the gospel, though when I met him I certainly would not have guessed it in his speech. Another was a graduate engineer. Among the rest were an ace in the war, a millionaire's son, a boy who had done some "time," a newspaper man, and an embryo lawyer.

I selected them because I knew that they were good fliers, yet I knew at the same time all of them were gentlemen and most of them scholars. I explained my plan to them—not only to use them for this one picture, but if we were all agreeable to keep them always as a squadron—and for a name of this squadron I gave them a choice. I wanted them to decide whether we should call it "The Buzzards" or whether it ought to be called "The Squadron of Death." The latter name was voted down. To them it sounded too dramatic, and one of them said, "Who expects this to be a Squadron of Death? We're all experienced fliers—why should we think of death?" So it was "The Buzzards" from that time on, and our squadron emblem was that carrion eater himself.

A few days' practice and I was satisfied. There was not one of them whom I could shake from me. If I looped they looped, if I spun so did they, and as for straight flying, I

knew that there would be no question of the company's being satisfied. So close did they fly in horizontal front-line formation that from the ground you'd swear that their wings were touching. And when the time came for our take-off for the location we arose in a squadron and kept the formation until we landed.

Everybody liked everybody else. There was just enough divergence in tastes, dispositions, and characters to make it a congenial, trusting bunch, and one which would do anything for a squadron member.

We were a bunch of Buzzards. From the beginning until the last man alive, we said, we'd stand for one another and for the right kind of leadership, and we agreed that if there were a death among us that gap would never be filled. Perhaps, if a picture called for more of us than there were, we would fill in, but it would only be temporarily.

It was a gay bunch, and in the course of our many conferences each got to be known by some like or dislike or by some trait of personality. Lonnie Hay was called the Honey Buzzard because he liked the women, Spencer the Technical Buzzard, for he was always figuring out the aërodynamics of the game. Baker the Judicial Buzzard, Cook the Flight Buzzard, Stoffer the Jester, and myself the Chief Buzzard.

Every morning at sunrise our mechanics had the ships warmed and ready for flight before breakfast, and if anyone did not keep formation he was the butt of jokes to the rest of the flock. And a Buzzard's "razz" is a tough thing to stand.

Some of the turns and dives and stunts were difficult, but not to this squadron. Inside the length of the field they could change to three different formations, from a V to an echelon to a line.

More than that, between those seven and myself in the air and my mechanics on the ground I had reserve pilots, race drivers, parachute jumpers, high divers, and motorcycle specialists. There was nothing which you asked of that squadron that you could not have immediately.

Even Fred Osborn, who had jumped the motorcycle from the Palisades with a parachute which did not open, was among those technicians on the ground. Crippled as he was, he could do more work and produce more results around a motor in a minute than any two of the others could in an hour.

In charge of my mechanical shop I had Garland Peed. I had almost gotten down on my knees to a judge for him once to beg that the rash flier only be fined for looping around telephone poles. It cost me eighty dollars to get him out.

Field mechanics and riggers were in charge of Lieutenant H. Rouse and Sergeant Costenborder.

I was satisfied with my squadron and took great pride, not only in having gotten this group together, but in holding them always as a unit.

But the formations, the squadron landings, and take-offs were but part of the work to be done on this location. There were the crack-ups.

Up to this time I had now successfully survived twenty-six of them and that's a good many ships if you were to

have them all assembled and then say, "Now I'll crack this one up, or smack that one down." So I began to think that I knew what wrecking a plane was. Yet when George Fitzmaurice said, "Now listen, Dick, in this first crash you must go over on your back, and remember—if you go over on your back in the second one it's no good to us," I began to think that they were expecting just a little too much of an airplane out of control and of a pilot busy waving broken struts and leaping wings out of his way.

Nevertheless, I had nothing to worry about for the present, because in the first one I was to make the ship go over on its back. I thought I could oblige the director in this, having had experiences enough like it before. So I got the ship ready, preparing it much as I had those for *Wings*. Then I organized my rescue crews and put them in charge of Ross Cook and Captain Campbell. Having had them on this duty for me before, I knew that I had no worries on that score.

Then Hezi (Cullen) Tate, the assistant director, assembled all of those on troupe (totalling between three and four hundred) and gave them a little speech which ended with: ". . . and if one of you eggs starts out on that field after the crash I'll sock you over the head with this"—and he held up a big club. So I knew that I was properly policed.

Then I was shown where to crack. They had drawn a circle about ten feet in diameter, and they wanted the ship to land as near to it as possible. I looked them over rather quizzically. They weren't asking *much*—to crash an airplane at a speed of eighty-five or more and insist that it

flop over on its back on or near a circle. On my birthday at that. A few years ago, about that very same time of day, I had crashed into the world, and now *Boom!* I was apparently trying to crash out of it, for the way in which they expected me to land on the spot demanded that I come in with the wind on my tail. That alone would add about twenty miles more to the speed of the thing.

Calmly I drew a handkerchief out of my pocket. "I'll go you one better," I said. "I'll bet when the dust quiets down some part of my ship will cover this." And I had a bet.

Then followed the same old programme. Cameras were set, people placed. The fire apparatus was ready for instant use and my rescue crew stood around, each man with his particular instrument.

I did something which I had always wanted to do before. I wanted to perform a little scientific test of myself, just for my own observation. I went to the emergency hospital and had a complete physical. My eyes and ears were tested. I had the doctor take my blood pressure and I had him record my heartbeats.

In the meantime my motor was warmed. I got into the ship, made a final adjustment of the belts, and taxied it over near the camera stands. I smiled slightly as I noticed the drawn, worried faces. That ominous silence which always pervades such dramatic situations was present for me here. It is something which the camera cannot photograph, something that theatregoers miss when they see one of my actual crack-ups. In truth those on the troupe and those who see me make these thrills get more by many

times out of them than those who see them later surrounded by stories which build them to a climax.

I looked over at Colleen Moore, who had agreed to witness this one crash, and rather pitied her as she stood by with a sort of grim little expression of determination. How I wish that I could stand by just for once and watch some other pilot crawl out! I know I'd get a real thrill out of it.

They say that some people cry out as I hit, others turn their backs, still others get hysterical, and to me that's more or less of a laugh, because I'm too busy about that time to get hurt—or to think of it.

Again I received my last instructions, which were a repetition of words I had heard about fifty times. *Hit the spot!* I gave them the Buzzards' salute and the motor the gun. Off. This ship was also going to join that Squadron of Death. It must furnish wings and motors for those on the other side. I hope they'll never need ships so long as I'm here, and I don't think they will, but I do feel sorry for some of the good crates I have flown to death, and I was sorry for this one. It had the best motor of any of those on the line; it was the ship which I had used to lead the squadron. As it hummed and droned its way around the trees for the last time I should have liked to make it easy for it, but that I couldn't do. A smash-up with the wind and turning it over on its back meant—well, just to touch a match to it afterward and so put it out of its misery.

One of these days all of those dead ships, ships which I have murdered, will get together and frame on me, and they'll reincarnate their abused spirits into one and send that one back for me to crack up. Then it may be my turn

to join the Squadron. I think perhaps they tried to gang up on me when I flew the D-7 into its grave, but those friends of mine who pilot them daily got wise to the plot and sent me a hunch.

But the spirit of that ship was due to whizz through space very soon because I had rounded the trees. Coming close to the ground, I glimpsed the circle of yellow dust and got a faint flash of the handkerchief in its centre.

The next time around was the designated time, so I cut the field short and headed back. Now once more I came low. I was skimming over the tops of the hills back of the field with excessive speed. When the trees at the end of the field loomed up I deliberately bit off about four feet of their foliage with the undercarriage, as a last floral offering to that nearly dead ship.

Then I dropped it down closer to the ground. The spot was approaching, and it was time to dig the propeller into the ground. There once more was that dull thudlike sound as the stick splintered. A wing crumpled. The motor turned up in a last whine before I shut it off. I could see it bending out of its frame and back toward the front cockpit. Then we started up on its nose. For just one second we hung there balanced at the top of that reverse ground loop and I said, "Yes, it's going to! No, it's not! Yes, it is!"—and the "yeses" finally won. With a last dying quiver the ship turned over on its back. *Yes—sir!* It turned its belly to the sky and its back to the ground, and from where I was, bottom side up, I reached down and picked up the handkerchief.

XXVIII

BUZZARDS AND CRACK-UPS

When I got out of the ship the doctor counted my heartbeats. There were just exactly as many afterward as there were before. I hadn't lost a one, nor had I gained any. He took my blood pressure, which also checked with the figures he noted before the flight. I began to wonder if there was such a thing in life for me as a thrill, for I certainly had not had one, otherwise there would have been a slight variation in the two medical reports.

But there was no time to dwell on such subjects. I had two other crashes to do, one a particularly hard one, since if the ship turned over on its back the shot was ruined. Incidentally, the third one was not so easy because, though the ship was not to leave the ground, I was supposed to taxi it between two trees, ripping off the wings. False wings were already under construction—wings which were light and which did not have any drift or anti-drift wires in them. Yet with all I expected this to be quite a smash.

For the present I had to think of that crack-up in which I dared not flop over on my back, and the more I figured the fewer conclusions I reached. How could I possibly give them a spectacular crash, yet avoid that one wrong manœuvre?

Finally I thought of an angle which, though it did not insure the director's desired result, might aid in bringing it about. I went to the machine shop and unbolted the heavy anvil from the floor. Then I had my mechanics install it in the section directly in front of the tail skid. I figured that with such a weight hung in the back of the fuselage it would require much more speed for the ship to rise to the point past the vertical, for it shifted the centre of gravity of the ship much farther back than it was normally. But if that big hunk of steel ever broke loose during the crash and wrapped itself around that broken neck of mine, I certainly would receive a few scratches.

However, the thing was ready to try and so on Thursday the 12th we rolled the ship out and warmed it up. I took my physical exam and last instructions and was off.

What a feeling! Though I compensated as much as possible with the variable angle of incidence on my stabilizer, still the ship was tail-heavy; but I couldn't blame it because I know that if I had as much weight as it did where it did I'd probably be heavy where it was, too.

With difficulty I managed to fly around the field and swoop low over the spot where I was to crash. On the second time around it was necessary for me to use both hands on the stick. Once more I was coming in to crack up. The spot was but two hundred feet ahead of me. With a bad wind on my tail I could not see anything but failure for this stunt. It would be almost impossible to hit on a wing, landing carriage, or nose and not turn over. However, I had no intention of striking on these points because if I

did the ship would not stay upright under any conditions with enough speed.

Instead, I raised the nose of the ship until it was about a hundred feet from the ground. Then I kicked the left rudder and shoved the stick over in the same direction. I was taking advantage of the knowledge which I had gathered in that accidental crack-up years before when I had been forced down the side of a cliff. I was going into a side slip.

It was a real one, my wings being almost vertical to the ground. And if you don't think it's a peculiar sensation to see the earth approach you and the side of the fuselage, ask any pilot who has had to slip a ship into the ground. But my eyes were on a particular spot—the yellow circle. The ship was just a little behind it and it looked as though I were going to miss it altogether. However, I had forgotten to calculate the full force of that wind on my tail. I watched the wing crumple into the fuselage and into the motor. I felt a keen pain in my left side as the nose hit.

Then that ship did a peculiar thing. Standing almost vertical, it made a complete spin, or ground barrel roll, on the crankshaft and then slid backward for more than fifty feet.

If I thought I got a sensation when I saw the ground approaching me from the side, it was but a beginning to the thrill that I experienced when that airplane went into reverse. As a matter of fact, I didn't have any idea that a ship could be made to do such a thing, and my thoughts were divided. Would the motor break through and land on my lap and was I going to be able to stop near that circle

Sons of Death on duty for COLLEEN MOORE. *The captain and his squadron. Four have flown "over the horizon to the other side."*

of dust? Of one thing I was certain. That anvil in the back was certainly holding down the tail.

It was all over now. Another ship had passed into the hands of the Squadron. All four of the spars in the left wing were broken, the linen was torn and crumpled. Naturally the back of the fuselage received as much damage as had the motor and propeller, for in that short flight backward it had taken a lot of punishment.

Again I was fortunate. The wreck was not on the yellow ring, but it was so close to it that I was satisfied. So, incidentally, was George Fitzmaurice.

Colleen Moore came to me afterward and said that she had never witnessed anything which had thrilled her so much, and which at the same time so frightened her; but I guess Colleen forgot that that was my twenty-eighth crash.

But just about that time *I* began to realize it. That sharp pain I had felt when the motor hit the ground once more asserted itself. My chest was sore, and it became painful for me to breathe. So I went to my quarters and stripped to the waist. With a little extra pressure on certain ribs I found my first hunch correct. A couple of them had broken from the jolt I received as I slammed up against the safety belts.

I got the squadron together and told them that I had to go back to Los Angeles, and asked them to continue under the leadership of Ross Cook until I got back. That's the advantage to the commander of a squadron in having a capable flight lieutenant. I knew that the Buzzards could and would operate efficiently during my absence.

Subsequent events proved this to be so. Every morning they went through their manœuvres. All formation continued for the picture while I was away, and one of the greatest things that a squadron could do for a leader they did for me.

My third crash was due. That was the one for which I was getting very little money because the plane did not have to leave the ground. Yet there was a considerable element of danger in it, because the fake wings were unbalanced and had no ailerons. And if the ship bumped into one of the trees instead of going between them the pilot was sure to be injured.

When the Buzzards saw that I was not going to be able to return in time for the picture's needs they held a conference. This thing had to be done; it was up to them to see that it was. So they all drew straws and the one having the shortest was to do the stunt. And from all reports it was not a question of forcing anyone to draw. They all wanted the opportunity to do this for the squadron. Stoffer, the Jester, was the lucky one. And when the time came he carefully set the ship back at the designated spot. Then, getting in, he did not ease the gun to that motor. He just naturally gave it all it would take. When he passed through the trees he was making a good fifty miles an hour, and what there was left of that ship no one could use. Stoffer had also sent one down to the boys to use.

But the crack-up of crack-ups on that location was an accident.

All during the time that we were on the location the owner of the land had begged for a ride. Either we were too busy

at the times he was present or the ships were being used as background for other scenes and so my squadron was not available for passenger service. Moreover, I had built all the ships into single-seated fighters except one which we kept for emergency use. Baxter, however, had brought his own ship to the location in the meantime, and this was the one opportunity that the owner of the land was looking for. So he begged Phillips to take him up in it, and after the proper consent was received Phillips loaded his passenger into the front seat and strapped himself in back. As it was nearly dark Phil did not take time to remove the control stick from the front cockpit, but took off for what he figured a very short hop.

It was shorter than he figured. Hardly had they gotten off the ground and out of reach of the flying field than the passenger found the controls, and never having been in a ship before he just shoved them out of the way, so he could see better over the side. That was the end of that flight. The ship nosed into the ground and went over on its back so quickly that none of us started running until it was all over.

Neither was hurt, but while they were still upside down the one in the front seat hollered back to Phillips, "Hey, is that all there is to it?"

"What do you mean, all there is to it? Isn't a crack-up enough?" Phillips said angrily.

"Crack-up? You mean this ain't just part of the stunt, then?" And Phillips broke out into a string of strong adjectives which have no place here nor there.

After our work on the location was finished we had a

real test of our ability to fly, for we got to those sequences which required a concentrated attack by my squadron of seven R. A. F. planes on a regular formation of nine Germans. That meant that I had to organize another unit. This would naturally seem a difficult thing to do on the spur of the moment, but with the organization which I had it was really quite simple. Altogether I had eight men, including myself, on whom I could depend for good formation work. I split these fliers into two groups, one headed by myself and one headed by Frank Baker (Ross Cook assuming an important position in the German formation which I led). Then with such other good fliers as I could find I filled up the gaps in both units, and on our first flight we had two of the prettiest squadrons that I've ever seen.

And could they fly? In close formation we had to fly up through the clouds every morning for weeks, and during that entire time there were no accidents or near accidents. This is phenomenal when you consider that nineteen ships (including three camera planes) would climb through that bucket of milk that blanketed the earth to the sunlight above before they even started the daring mix-up.

It was interesting and exciting. Sixteen ships all milling around—diving, looping, spinning. Bursts from machine guns and the hum of roaring motors filled the air. These boys were really fighting, getting a touch of the same thing that a majority of them had had years before. Never did you see one ship alone. They all singled out an adversary and got on his tail until he himself was driven to protection. Ships went down in flames, others actually dropped

out with a missing, spluttering motor. Nor did those of us in the battle pay any attention to forced landings until I fired a red signal from my Very pistol.

It would all cease as suddenly as it began and we would race with each other to the field. There were no formations on the way back—it would have been a waste of time. Most of us just put the ships into a spin through the clouds, and came out only when the earth again became an actuality.

Sometimes I would stay up above for a few minutes to admire the other existence. There was no earth now, for around and below me were only clouds. It had always been a source of wonderment to me—this outside of the earth. And you are outside when these pillars completely block vision of water and land.

Up there also exist cities, with their avenues of clouds and their star scrapers. Often I have flown down these avenues only to find them blind. When I turned around I would discover that a huge high building had moved itself directly across my path and I'd have to move quickly so as not to be caught in the swirling mass. Some of them rise so tall and have such well-defined sharp corners that I get a thrill out of hitting them. In the imagination it is the same as crashing, for at the very moment I hit their edge I expect to hear that crunching, grinding sound that accompanies my deliberate crashes. Perhaps I have learned something of crack-ups from these cities of clouds, with their ever moving and ever changing streets.

But they are not so different from our earthly cities. Down below also old buildings are torn down, old land-

marks removed, and in their stead are built bigger, taller skyscrapers. The main difference between Cloud Street and Broadway is just the element of time it takes to make the transition.

Once after dropping through the clouds from one of these air battles I flew upon a buzzard. I don't know whether he heard me or not but I rather think so, for his awkward old wings were flopping as hard as they could. Ordinarily you can watch them for hours from the ground and they don't move a wing tip. Well, I wanted to say "hello" to him and I wished him to tell all of the little buzzards that I had a plane in my squadron named after every one of them, but he just turned his gawky ugly head toward me long enough to see this new giant who had come to usurp his kingdom and then he put forth his best efforts to get away.

For some time I played formation with him and then, as if to show him a little bit about flying, I went into a loop. I'll bet I wake up some morning with Papa Buzzard and all the little buzzards around my doorsteps waiting for instruction in stunts.

It was during this period that Frank Baker, the Judicial Buzzard, and I put on the duel for the two principals of the cast. For more than a hundred hours we zoomed and dived on each other. We looped and spun. One Immelmann followed another as we crashed at each other from opposite directions, sometimes missing by a matter of inches. At first we tried to arrange all of the manœuvres on the ground, but we found that after we ran out of our prearranged stunts we had not even started a good battle, and so we

mixed it up as if it were real. Sometimes he would get on my tail, and when he did he was the hardest man to shake I've ever been up against, and when I'd get him in the same position I would pump him full of the dummy machine-gun bullets.

Every time the squadron ships had to be filled with gas Frank and a camera ship and I took off, hunted a cloud location, and did our private dog-fighting.

It was after one of these flights that we came down to find the squadron almost ready for us to take off. Just a minor adjustment had to be made on one of the ships that was supposed to burn up. In order to get this effort we had thirty-six separate smoke bombs grouped and fused together in a steel pan on the bottom of the ship. From there to the seat an electric connection was installed so that when the pilot closed the switch the bombs would immediately throw out a cloud of smoke and fire. To all appearances, even from the ground, the ship was doomed.

In the seat of this "fire" ship sat a mechanic, who was busy installing the very last of the apparatus necessary for the next flight. The bombs were placed, the wiring connected. He was just about to give word to a fellow mechanic to twist the prop when the assistant director called to him.

"Mechanic of the fire ship!"

Immediately the one called jumped from the plane and went over to the assistant director.

"Yes, sir," he reported.

"Is your——"

Boom! With a terrific hiss, accompanied by a slight ex-

plosion, the ship was a mass of flames. Evidently the wiring had shorted. Certainly it was a close call for the mechanic. If the assistant had not called him just when he did there would have been a body in that fire of gas and powder. The mechanic turned to the assistant director.

"Pardon me," he said, "were you about to say something?"

XXIX

WOULD I DO IT? WHAT A SILLY QUESTION!

In my selfish interest in my own work I forgot to mention what had happened to others in the game. A woman was drowned doubling for the feminine lead in a prominent Western star's picture. Following this two doubles were drowned trying to run a whirlpool in a river in Arizona.

Al Wilson's motor almost pulled out of his ship and he had to jump in a parachute. It was one of the closest calls that this daring stunt flier and aërial acrobat has ever had.

One more was added to the Squadron of Death when Al Johnson hit high-tension wires and was burned to a crisp, just before he was to do a stunt for *Hell's Angels.*

A snowslide killed one, and two more were injured when a director blew up the mast of a ship for an historical epic.

Bob Rose broke his arm while doubling for Alice White out at First National. It seemed to be striking all along the line.

Pauly Malvern took a nasty fall (about eighty-five feet) and was forced to retire.

I alone was fortunate. Directly from *Lilac Time* I went on *The Air Circus* and there again performed crack-ups. Before I did the second one, just one hour before, a com-

mercial pilot took off from Glover Field, where the picture was being made, and five minutes later he crashed into the ground and was killed.

But these deaths had no psychological effect on me. I was immune to every sort of shock. At least I thought I was. Immediately afterward I took off and smacked an OX5 into the rigs of its JN-4 and walked out as usual.

A couple of high-ranking navy officers came in to see the stunt and they rather marvelled at it, and asked me if I'd do them a favor and crack up some of the crates that they didn't like. I thought of the old equipment which slopped up the air at Pearl Harbor, T. H., and replied that I thought they had some ships that were too old and decrepit even for crashes.

While I was on this picture I met a star who thought she liked me a little bit, though in reality it was because of the crashes she had seen me do. She was not in *The Air Circus* but was a guest of one of the cast that day. When she left she said that she didn't think that breaking my neck had hurt my necking, which I thought was a dirty remark until I knew what she meant by "necking." Hicks from Hollywood like me sometimes go to New York to neck at the skyscrapers or the throngs on Broadway, but I guess some of these Hollywood girls don't need a crowd or a skyscraper.

Life seemed to be just one crack-up after another for me. After *The Air Circus* I was engaged to do the aviation work for *The Big Hop*, and although there was no crack-up scheduled I dragged one in.

In between the shots of the big cabin ships we were

using I had to carry newspaper people who were invited for "hops" by the publicity department. While in the air with two of these (both women) the company started to shoot another scene. We watched them from above, and it was really amusing to see those ants far below, crawling from place to place or running in one direction or another with no apparent reason or purpose. Now I can understand the busy scramble of an ant hill. Those little fellows, too, have reasons for rushing about.

We came in in a slow glide, and to all appearances the field was clear and unobstructed. But as we slid over the telephone wires at the end of the field a camera car unwittingly approached under my wing at a blind angle and I sat right down on top of it!

Well, there were four in the automobile and three in the ship (including me) and I was the only one who got a scratch. Again I hurt the rib that had been injured in *Lilac Time*.

We continued to work and finished the picture before sundown that evening, and I sent the planes to their different hangars. Then I went home and tried to get some of the oil and dust out of my skin. While I was peacefully enjoying the luxury of the hot water the telephone rang. At first I did not answer, but it was insistent. Finally, more or less outraged to be disturbed at such a time, I clothed myself scantily and answered it.

"Hello, Dick," came the voice at the other end of the wire, "got bad news for you. Frank Baker was killed on his way home to-night. Tried a barrel roll five hundred from the ground. Something went wrong—never came out!"

Almost mechanically I hung up the receiver. This was the first time that the Old Man had struck into my squadron of Buzzards to add to the ranks of his Squadron of Death.

But it was not the last. Crossan, who had been held as a relief pilot, flew down to Imperial Valley to give instruction in stunts.

"Now I'll show you how to do an Immelmann turn," he said to the student before he left the ground. And he did. When he went over on his back his wings left the ship, and of course he flew right on and still is if he hasn't arrived at those gates asking admittance to the Squadron.

With this blow just accepted and fixed in my mind, there came the word that Baxter had also died in the cockpit. After he finished *Lilac Time* he took his ship to Texas, and it was while instructing a student that the latter "froze" the controls. As hard as he tried, Baxter could not right the ship before it plunged nose first into the ground.

Now I realized the hunch that had made me want to call this the Squadron of Death. Long before when we were quartered in our tents for the night we would get together for a conference before retiring. Then I would look them all over and wonder which one would be the first to get it. But I did not think that three of them would join those on the other side within such a short span of time. I felt as if the Old Man were playing me a dirty trick. Why should he pick on my squadron all the time? There were other aviators, other ships to crash. Three of them gone—three

empty places never to be filled in that squadron of Buzzards.

Then shortly after I finished *The Big Hop* Phillips went with *Hell's Angels*. Phillips was one of my best pilots. There was nothing he couldn't and hadn't handled from Reginald Denny's "Snipes" to the new tri-motored Fords.

In this last picture he was flying an old SE-5. He had made short landings on tough fields, and forced landings on rough ones. Yet one morning when he was flying from one field to another, preparatory to the day's work, the motor quit. With his usual skill he slipped into a small field and found that he was almost out of gas. He put some in the tank—how much no one seems to know. Then once again he took off. But his motor spluttered when he was making a climbing turn. It quit. The ship fell into a dive from which it never came out.

Some think that he was still shy gas, others that he had motor trouble, but what difference does it make?

When people ran to the wreck they expected to find a mutilated body—cut, bruised, and disfigured. How surprised were they to find that apparently he had not been scratched. He just sat there with his head forward as if in a daze or as if he were unconscious.

Dragging him from the wreck, they put him on the ground. He was not breathing. There was no sign of life. He was dead. His neck had apparently been broken, either by some object which hit him in back or from the sudden snap forward. I knew what that felt like. I knew how little he suffered, for he had an advantage over me. When he

broke his he did not have to live through that slow, painful process of getting well.

When I heard that the fourth out of my eight had deserted me it was almost too much. Fifty per cent. of them in a little over six months. At that rate within a year there would not be one of us to claim that piece of parchment, with our signatures and positions on it, which the last one living was to own. And I thought I was immune from all personal feelings, that no one person's death could affect me. How wrong!

At nights again I could hear their voices, see them in a group razzing and bantering each other. I could feel their presence everywhere about me. Suddenly a favorite expression of one of them would pop up in my mind and I'd probably use it for a whole day. My dreams at night were filled with their gaunt faces. And it seemed as though they jibed and chided me for lingering so long behind. A mass of them returned nightly. It included all of that Squadron of Death, but invariably there were Baker, Baxter, Crossan, and Phillips in the lead. There also were Gene Perkins, Bud Creeth, Dick Curwood, Locklear, Delay, Burgess.

My mind was troubled. I could find no peace. I was alone. Now only Ross Cook, Stoffer, Hay, and Spencer were left, besides myself, and I knew that they also were feeling the pressure of the staggering total. This was one battle we had lost. Never had one of us been killed in formation or when we had worked as a unit. But that scythe had cut us down when we were separated.

Spencer went to the hospital with severe head injuries occasioned by an accidental crash. He was not expected to live. A frontal fracture of the skull—marred for life. Well—just another miscalculation.

I was sick with it all. Not of flying. I was flying harder than I ever had in my life. Work was getting more and more difficult. Technique was required in crashes which only a stroke of luck could accomplish. Yet I wanted a rest. I had had but that one short week with Georgie Smith.

Then Garland Peed was killed back East, so Alice White told me. The Buzzard whom I had gotten out of jail left without a good-bye, and incidentally he flew into those gates still owing me eighty bucks. I suppose when I join I'll have to get him out of some trouble down there too. He just couldn't get along.[1]

And about this time I received a letter from my father:

MY DEAR SON:

I sincerely hope that you are progressing nicely in your chosen profession. We, your mother and I, have all the confidence in the world that before long you will have reached your goal.

But it is with sincere regret that I note that you do not want to finish your university education. That is one of the few things which you cannot lose and which cannot be stolen from you.

It was my secret ambition for you to follow the study of law, and to eventually take up my unfinished work. But God had other plans for you. I have retired, as I have so often threatened, and of course the practice which I enjoyed is going to waste. Why don't *you* retire now from what you call your "game" and resume the study of law? There is my library, and the benefit of my experi-

1As the book is going to press, Captain Grace from a hospital bed asks us to say that he has since learned that Garland Peed's injuries were not fatal.—THE PUBLISHERS.

ence at your command—also what small fortune I have saved. As your two brothers are professors, you are the only one whom I can call upon to carry on my work.

Therefore consider very thoroughly, and endeavor to please me just this once.

Sincerely your father,
R. H. Grace.

Well, I thought that letter over for hours—days. After all, this game had given me nothing but body breaks and heartaches. Why continue?

I sat down and figured. It would take me three and a half years to get my two degrees—a B.A. and a LL.D. What could I accomplish here in the same length of time? Already this Hollywood alone had taken nine years of life. I had enjoyed it, asked for it, but as far as advancement was concerned I was just as far ahead at this time as then.

My trunks packed, I did not even fly home. I took the train. At the station I was met by my father and mother. It was the first time I had seen them in ten years. Not since I came in uniform had we so much as glimpsed one another. Perhaps I felt more intensely then than I have in all of these years of stunts.

For two weeks we talked over old times: my youth, my pranks. I visited with former school companions, we went to our old hangouts. I hunted and fished—and it was a good vacation. But it was just *that*. I grew restless, wanted to go somewhere. The beautiful sunsets, the sereneness of the quiet life were too much of an extreme, I told my father

that I'd wire my answer to him from New York—the answer to the same old question: Would I continue the study of law?

But when I got to the big city again and visited my friends I knew what that wire would say.

Two weeks in and around Broadway and then came a special air-mail letter. The part that interested me was as follows:

For a month we have been trying to locate you to produce the thrill for our next picture. Perhaps the risk will be too great for you to undertake, but here is what we want: An airplane motor quits over the centre of a big city. It is necessary for the pilot to land. No available space can be found, so the pilot must crash on the top of a building—preferably one of some height. Can you do it for us? Wire immediately.

Sincerely yours,
Adventure Film Corp.

Now why hadn't I thought of doing that before? I believed that my crack-ups in *Wings* eclipsed anything I might ever attempt—but this one? Well, it was a real man-sized crack-up. Would I do it? What a silly question!

My trunks were packed and checked that same day. Late in the afternoon I grabbed a train. I was on my way to Hollywood for my thirty-second crack-up. What could compare with the thrill and excitement of the game? And I thought I could leave it! Then I realized one thing. I could never leave it! I was broken in to it. It might be a game, it could never be called a profession, but it was my game, even if it offered no future.

I sat down and wrote the following note to a friend of mine in the New York I was speeding away from:

DEAR N——

I don't want to be a lawyer. You know I never will. Am sorry for my friends and my father—but then, this is something which I have also worked to a nicety. I don't know law; I do aviation and stunts. Therefore I go back to the work I know and like. And I'm as full of pep as a spring chicken with a prairie hawk on its tail. You think not? Well, you ought to see me try to sit still long enough to write to you. I tell you I've got motors in my pants that just keep shoving me on toward that good old field, and to those crates locked up in the hangar.

Sort of glad I took Mrs. A. M. W.'s and your advice and wrote this partial history of stunt men. They're a great bunch of boys, both those in my squadron and also those who fly in the Squadron of Death.

I wonder if Georgie Smith is married yet. You remember her? Well, she certainly crashed me up nicely. I fell like nobody's hours off.

Yours for happy landings,

DICK.

P. S. Did I forget to tell you that Red Thompson, who forced that Arab horse of his off the cliff, was drowned trying to swim rapids in a picture called *The Trail of '98?*

R. V. G.

THE END

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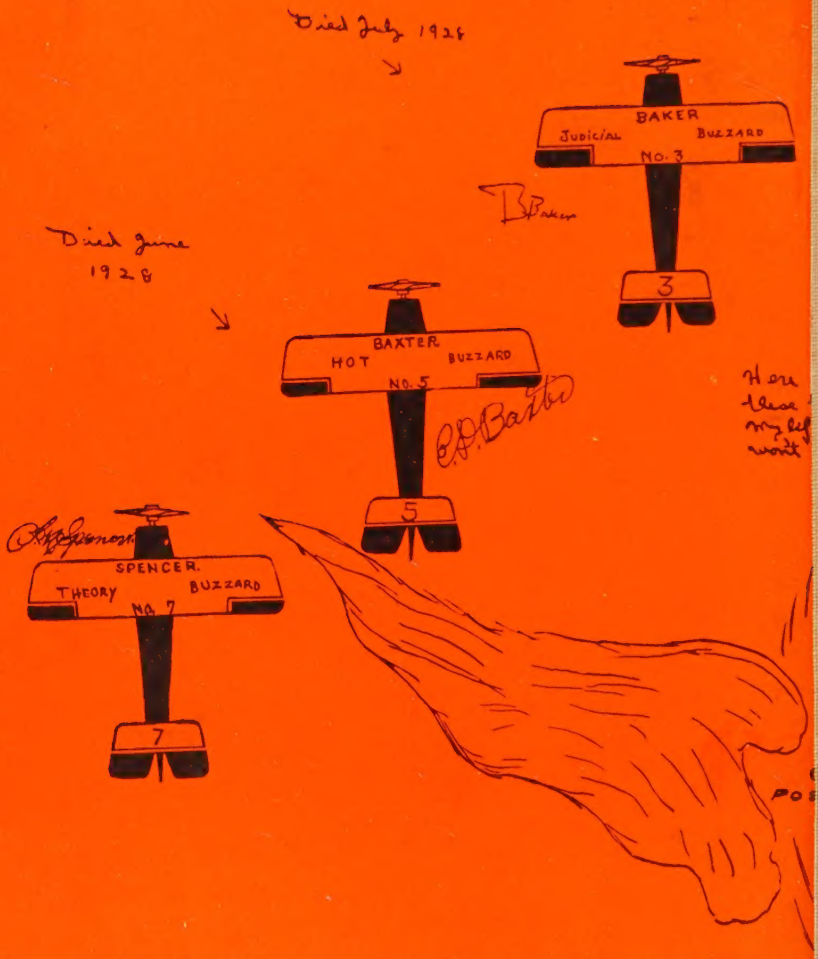
Squadron of death.



X Relief Pilot Crossair killed July '28

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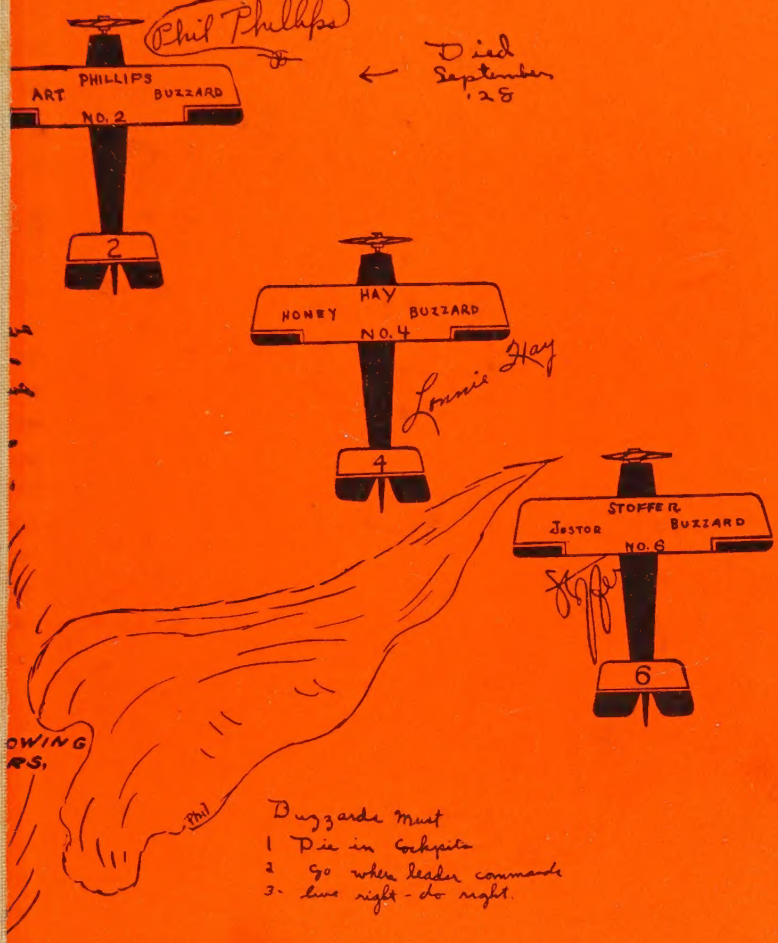

The Fatality chart of the Buzzards—picked members of the Squadron of Death who must die in cockpits—a facsimile reproduction of the original autographed document given to Dick Grace, the captain, on January 10, 1927. Since then three Buzzards and a Relief Pilot have been killed, and Buzzard No. 7 at the present time is in the hospital with a fractured skull. In case Dick Grace dies crashing, this Death Chart becomes the heritage of the last Buzzard on earth.